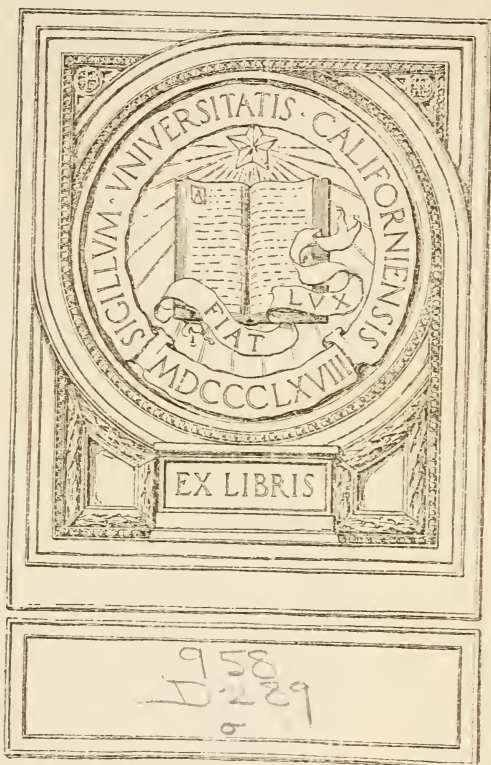


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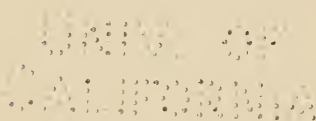
OLD AND NEW IN THE COUNTRYSIDE



# OLD AND NEW IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

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LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C. 4

FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK

BOMBAY, CALCUTTA AND MADRAS

1920





## PREFATORY NOTE

THESE papers, written at widely different times, describe some varying stages of life in the countryside during the last forty years. The first two chapters belong to the end of the nineteenth century; 'The Age of Morris Dancing' to the transition period which succeeded it, when a stirring of the social consciousness resulted in a variety of more or less superficial attempts to reconstitute rural life without that corresponding revolution in the social and economic sphere which alone could substantiate them. 'The Country-town' refers to the period which immediately preceded the War, and still in greater or less degree survives it. The changes which that universal catastrophe is bound to produce are not yet to be determined; but that, for better or for worse, they herald the end of an epoch—the 'Passing of the Old Order'—can no longer be open to dispute.



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IN THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES  
WINTER IN THE COUNTRY-HOUSE



## CHAPTER I

### WINTER IN THE COUNTRY-HOUSE

(From a Schoolroom Window)

IT is only four o'clock—another hour still to tea-time. We have been at lessons all the afternoon to-day, for there is a thick white fog and a drizzle, and we did not go out to the village as usual. How dull the Roman history is!—read aloud to us in French, while we sew, and the two younger ones do their preparation at a little double desk in the corner. That desk is an innovation ; till last month they always sat up on high chairs, legs dangling and shoulders poked up high to get the elbows on the table. How we long for the sound of the swing-door on the gallery and the footman's entry with the red schoolroom tray and the willow-pattern cups! It is the signal for a general clearance, a folding up and putting away, a race to finish a chapter above the clattering, a desperate dash at a refractory sum. The stable clock strikes five : and now the cocoa-pot—cocoa-nibs, the new fashion of the eighties—is steaming on the table, the plates of plum-bread and queen cakes

—all the familiar productions of the English still-room—are laid, and we sit down to schoolroom tea. There is a pleasurable expectancy about the party to-day, for there are no visitors downstairs, and the mother of the family is coming to tea in the schoolroom. She is always late, but she comes at last, when we have almost finished, smiling always and refreshingly oblivious of our schoolroom troubles—‘bad marks,’ and raps on the knuckles at piano lessons, interminable lists of ‘exports and imports,’ of Jewish Kings—*does* Jehoiada come before Jehoiachim, or after?—of English Kings and their dates—‘William the Conqueror’s a Daring Dog—Ten hundred and sixty-six,’ and so on. Well, they can all be dismissed now; we have finished everything, even the impositions, and are going to spend the whole evening downstairs. We shall play with the babies—an uproarious party in the rocking-boat, or hiding behind the library curtains, where bells against possible burglars make terrifying uproar if we are not careful; we shall listen to reading aloud; perhaps we shall sing—Christy Minstrels, Harrow School songs; we shall disappear, some of us, behind the big screen to bury ourselves in the mysteries of Christmas presents, where the paint-boxes and the coloured paper can be



easily concealed. And then bed-time will come, and the scared rush across the great dark hall, while we hold our breath and dart up across the gallery and down the long passage to the nursery, where the friendly lamp and the warm fireside give us welcome, and the gentle face of our Nurse in the 'easy-chair,' with the baby purring over his bottle in her arms, still rosy from his evening tub.

. . . . .

Long and dark and dreadfully cold were those long-ago winters in the country. The luxuries of central heating were unknown, and except on Sundays no fires were allowed in the bedrooms. Once established for the winter in the country-house there was no leaving it again till the appointed time came to go up to London. There were no week-end visits, no motors in which to run up to town for a night.

County balls were rare occurrences, for the distances were great; and there were few children's parties. Families were proverbially large in the country-houses, and for this reason, as well as the quietness of their lives, inclined to be shy and self-contained. A party in the country meant being dressed up—white frocks, blue sashes, lockets—an extra dose of washing and brushing—detestable process; it meant an

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endless drive in a crowded carriage in the charge of a highly-strung governess, a midnight return at a foot's pace, often through the fog, the footman walking in front with a lantern to show the way.

Nowadays those winters would be considered unendurably dull, deleterious too in every way for the children. The less robust of them constantly lay awake whole nights with cold feet or the irritation of chilblains. Music and drawing lessons, the 'extras' *de rigueur* of that age, were not to be had within twenty miles ; socially the life was a blank.

Yet the families who settled down for the winters in the old country-houses provided plenty of excitements for themselves, albeit they were humble ones ; and as for being dull, they would not have understood the suggestion. Was there not the weekly excitement of Sunday—the great family exodus to the parish church, eight or nine of the party in the spacious barouche, if it was a distant one, the children overflowing into the dicky behind, or tucked away on the box between coachman and footman ? At a soberer pace in the rear followed the 'van,' full of servants in Sunday-best, and drawn by an ancient and well-favoured cart-horse, who never exceeded his own dignified pace. On Monday there was the mothers' meeting, and

all the gossip of the village was retailed at schoolroom tea afterwards ; on Wednesday the week-night service in the school, when, in Lent or Advent, strange preachers from a distance—generally laymen—proclaimed fervid doctrines of Evangelicalism, unfamiliar to the frequenters of the generally colourless parish church. Then there was the working-party in aid of foreign missions. The Sunday-school teachers, the farmers' daughters, the *petite bourgeoisie* of the village, foregathered on Thursday afternoons at the Hall to sew, to listen to the reading of a missionary magazine, and to discuss cups of weak tea and Marie biscuits amid the imposed constraint of extreme gentility.

The hours of lessons were long in those days, and the children's outings short, but there was always an object for the afternoon walk with the governess in carrying food to the old women or the sick of the village. Every day at luncheon a peculiar long basket containing two china pots was brought in by the footman, and filled by the lady of the house herself with the remains of meat and pudding from the table. To carry this to 'the poor' provided the *raison d'être* for the children's walk ; and after a shooting party there was a heavier burden, for then the mangled carcasses of slain rabbits had to be carried too across the oozing greens

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and down the lanes knee-deep in mud, where often they were dropped by the children and still further bespattered with mud before they reached their destination in some distant cottage. There were certain blind people to be visited once a week, certain senile old labourers. Mothers with new-born babies had gruel taken them, and the loan of the 'bag,' a collection of familiar necessities, including a somewhat coarse layette.

The children of those days were thrown on their own resources much more than are the children of this age. The village was their natural preserve; but there were always the animals to be tended at home, pets of every sort from rabbits to tortoises, and if all else failed they told themselves stories—long, lovely stories which lasted for years, and were full of entrancing heroes and heroines of the regular Victorian type: gallant Colonels, pale young widows, kindly squires with blushing daughters—who yet performed wondrous feats in the hunting-field—benevolent country vicars. The Vicarage was always the synonym for culture and kindness in these stories, the Hall for a bountiful largesse, for blankets at Christmas and port-wine in convalescence.

Christmas—the great longed-for event of the long winter! Which, I wonder now, was

the best of all, the alluring anticipation, the delirious realisation, the delectable retrospect? It was still something of the old-fashioned Christmas in those days, though the national customs of the season were fast dying out in the majority of homes. There was still the jollity, the good cheer, the neighbourliness. The ox was still cut up for distribution to the cottagers, the presents were innumerable, the family parties enormous. When the schoolboys came home for the Christmas holidays, it was the signal for an outburst of gaiety and entertainment. There was riding and skating by day, dancing and singing by night. The hounds met at the Hall—oh! that was a great day!—the village concert and the school treat were celebrated. The Hall, of course, was responsible for the repertoire of the one, the prizes and buns of the other. The whole family took part in the concert. There were performances of ‘John Peel’ and ‘Hearts of Oak’ by the schoolboys, recitations of ‘Casabianca’ and ‘The Village Blacksmith’ by the girls. Nursery rhymes in action were performed by the nursery party, a scared and shivering little crowd in Shetland shawls behind the screen till the awful moment arrived, and they made their palpitating appearance. A piano duet, conducted by the governess, and a violin solo which racked



the nerves both of audience and performer completed the programme.

Emotionally the village audience was an unknown quantity. The tragic recitation of 'The Song of the Shirt' would draw convulsive laughter. Readings from 'Bleak House' left it cold and stolid. The Curate's thoroughly low-class performance of 'A Channel Crossing' left hardly a dry eye in the hall. It was an evening of extreme nervous tension for the youthful performers. There were sleepless nights beforehand, collapse for days afterwards; and when in the nineties the concession was made by which a select circle of villagers themselves were invited to contribute performances, it spelt unbounded relief to the school-room. In their own hearts the cottage people preferred to hear their own voices. Delicious tears were shed over such favourites as 'Little sister's gone to sleep' and that well-known lament for the deceased wife, with its pathetic refrain,

'But it's only a beautiful picture,  
In a beautiful golden frame.'

But those were decadent days—in the view of the Hall.

Once the Christmas holidays were over the curtain descended once more over the winter-life of Hall and village. Till Easter brought

the schoolboys back again, the children took up with more or less goodwill the 'daily round, the common task.' The village occupied nearly all their leisure hours. On Sunday morning, before the migration to church, Sunday-school classes were held in the 'gun-room,' or even the schoolroom. This minimised the risk of epidemics—and worse—which attendance in the school presented. The children sat on green baize benches, and held shiny black Bibles in their laps, designed for the purpose. They repeated the Collect for the day in somewhat uncomprehending tones, but they always sang the choruses of Sankey's hymns with emotion. In the nineties 'social evenings' for lads were taking the place of the night-schools of the eighties; they were held in the servants' hall, and included an hour's lesson in history, or sometimes in 'Citizenship,' a subject introduced in the schools for the first time by Mr. Arnold Forster's 'Citizen Reader.' Snap and draughts were permitted for the last hour, and well-sweetened cups of cocoa brought the proceedings to a close when the atmosphere had reached suffocation point. This popular innovation lost something of its charm when it was transferred to the newly erected village reading-room.

A sense of responsibility for the village and

countryside was the dominating factor in the ordering of country-house life. The whole family lived on a pedestal. The landlord must set an example. Tenants, employés, household servants, all took their cue from him. His actions were matters of real importance, his influence paramount. It mattered intensely if he went to church or not ; if he subscribed to one local charity rather than another ; if he patronised the hunt ball, the flower-show, the cricket match ; if his wife called on Mrs. So-and-So. All village institutions originated at the Hall. The landlord's county work obliged him to live in the light of publicity. He was County Councillor, Justice of the Peace, Chairman of the School Board. For one year in his public career he had reason to expect to be High Sheriff of the County. The Hall provided all the culture and all the recreation for the village at its door ; all the material assistance of distress too, for in periods of sickness or trouble it was the lady at the Hall who supplemented incredible wages by puddings and beef-tea, by blankets and flannel petticoats. The labourers' wages allowed of no margin for illness or accident. There was no Employers' Liability Bill, no Insurance Act ; and outbreaks of epidemics were universally attributed to an all-wise Providence, never to defaulting landlord or public authority.



The sense of ceaseless responsibility to poorer neighbours, of *noblesse oblige*, was strong in those days. It was inherited, and it came naturally. There was nothing self-conscious or artificial about it; it was the obvious prerogative of the country-house. It is easy as we look back to that age to criticise the premises which lay at the root of so much genuine kindness, so much thoughtful care for others. They were radically false. That the contemporary order of society was divinely appointed, and could be subject to no fundamental alteration, greatly as its evils could be ameliorated by charity; that the miseries of the poor were expressly permitted by the Almighty in order that the rich might find opportunities of service, and thus of developing the Christian virtues—those ideas, familiar in the writings of Hannah More and the Evangelical reformers of the first half of the nineteenth century, were still reflected in the ordering of country-house life and its mental attitude to the close of the century. ‘The poor’ were a race apart, different in all essentials, both physical and spiritual, to the rich. ‘I do love the poor’; such and such a thing ‘would be bad for the poor’—such familiar expressions revealed the gulf. Rich and poor were allowed hardly anything in common. Even their names were

of a different timbre. There were 'poor's clothes'—they were labelled so in the shop, and purchased at Christmas-time for presents in the village—their virtue consisting in lack of all colour and grace. There were 'books for the poor'—suitable gift-books for mothers' meetings and village reading-rooms. The Hall was responsible for the literary education of the village, and a special set of authors made a lucrative trade in producing appropriate selections. They all had the same church-going heroes, they all drew the same moral—in fact, to draw a moral was their *raison d'être*. 'Christie's Old Organ,' 'Mother's Last Words,' 'The Wide, Wide World,' were some of the best. Charlotte Yonge was generally considered unsuitable for 'the poor' in spite of her unimpeachable morals, as dealing too exclusively with the doings of the upper classes, both past and present, and calculated to arouse envious and unwholesome sentiments; but a special concession was sometimes made in the case of 'The Daisy Chain.' Of purely devotional books for the village Frances Ridley Havergal's held the first place in evangelical circles, Bishop Walsham How's and Dr. Moule's being reserved for the rather superior class who attended the weekly Prayer Meeting. The day of the 'penny dreadful' had come already, but between that

and the gift-book for 'the poor' there was no medium.

Fundamentally unsound as were the ideas of which these institutions were the symptoms, it cannot yet be maintained that there was nothing of permanent value in that dead philosophy, no redeeming features which have contributed to the common stock of moral treasure. With all its dangers a sense of personal responsibility for neighbours, as keen as it often was in the country-house of those days, is not altogether to be despised. There may be a place for it to-day, too, when it is translated into the altered conditions of the social body. But there is decidedly less of it at the present time in the mentality of the young. Not that there is less seriousness, less devotion to causes; there is more. But in the widening of the mental horizon which the growth of the scientific spirit in education and the increasing organisation of society has produced there is a danger that the concern for the particular and the personal, which limited too strictly the young lives of the eighties and nineties, may be omitted, detrimentally perhaps to the social consciousness. Opportunities of personal service are lacking even in the country-house to-day.

Many causes have contributed; above all the changing order of society. The influence of the

C.O.S. impresses on the young the folly of giving away money or goods without strict investigation ; stray elements of political economy frighten them with the vague sense that they are maintaining low wages by charity ; the echoes of Socialism warn them off from the suspicion of 'condescension,' mock at their latent consciousness of 'responsibility.' And since the problems opened up to their minds are so difficult of solution, so baffling even to the experts, and since in the village there is no organisation to hand for dealing in a scientific way with the cases of poverty and sickness which occur every day, the tendency is to leave them alone, and go elsewhere for work and interest. To the most earnest and devoted among the young, the School of Economics has often taken the place of the old-time daily visitation of the cottages. The influence of the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission which ticketed off the suffering poor, labelled them scientifically—children, the aged, the sick, the feeble-minded—and pigeon-holed them for treatment among the various Government departments, has reached the Hall at last. Lectures and public meetings and study circles—learning—or declaiming, instead of serving—these fill the mental horizon of the serious young of to-day. As far as the poor themselves are

concerned, there can be no question which occupation is the most beneficial in the long run. The social order must be investigated and classified before it can be served. Suffering humanity must be dealt with in the mass in the complicated intricacies of modern society with its vast industrial machine; and it is perfectly true that it serves a larger end to work to raise the whole economic status of women than to befriend one unfortunate girl; to get the Mental Deficiency Act well administered than to teach a feeble-minded child to read; to sit on the County Insurance Committee than to tide one family over a time of sickness by personal care and solicitude. The predominant need of the day is to work for the right legislation, to keep a strict, experienced eye on administration of justice and of local government.

But there are some who have neither capacity nor occasion to do these things; and for them the changed conditions imply too often a mere stemming of kindly impulses, a gradual drying up of the springs of sympathy which are only fed by acts of personal service. And in those who have rightly transferred their sympathies and activities to the larger objects, and work so zealously for causes of which their mothers were wholly ignorant, there is not seldom the

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lack of a certain quality of sympathy in their composition, of some human touch which only a personal relationship can develop. No age possesses a monopoly of opportunities for the enriching of character. If the past contributed some in which the present is lacking, the present will discover that it has to find a substitute.

IN THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES  
THE HEYDAY OF ROTTEN ROW







## CHAPTER II

### THE HEYDAY OF ROTTEN ROW

THERE can be no doubt that the country-houses of England made a distinct contribution to the national life in the eighties and nineties. On the whole the class they represented was a serious and responsible one. The countryside to which it belonged was its sphere for public and social obligations, the natural scope for that sense of 'duty to others' which the nineteenth century at its best so carefully instilled. Even amusements and sport were dignified in this view; they were vicarious activities. There was a 'duty' to gamekeepers and to partridges as there was to humbler neighbours.

But the claims of duty were not bounded by the countryside. London afforded a wider field; and life was equally divided between town and country. Summer and winter, each had its share, and old friends met each other in Hyde Park, year by year, to the day appointed. In London this class, though its roots were deeply cast in differing spheres, kept largely

to itself. It was distinct from the purely aristocratic circles who hail from the castles and ducal palaces of the land, distinct also from the 'smart set' and the *nouveaux riches* who were already familiar in London society before the end of the century.

It stood for certain spacious traditions, for ample means, public spirit, political and philanthropic responsibility. Whether the tradition were Whig or Tory mattered little in social life. The differences were almost imperceptible. The general outlook on life was uniformly similar, and the superficial disagreements served only to lend savour to intercourse.

If life in the country-house provided few opportunities of divergence from an accepted standard, life in the mansions of Belgravia was even more uniform in type. The very letters read at the breakfast-table were the same; there were letters from importunate constituents, requests to open flower-shows, to subscribe to cricket clubs. The family letters were hardly distinguishable; there were jolly, slangy letters from the boys at Eton and Harrow, full of cricket scores and house-matches, of urgent requests for 'tin,' or hampers of 'grub'; there were cheery letters from the girls at a shooting-party or a hunt-ball visit, all redolent of 'bags' and clothes—'tailor-mades' especially. The

post attended to, there followed the first social event of the day, when fathers and daughters met their friends in Rotten Row, and paraded, large, friendly parties of top-hats and gently ambling steeds; unhappy grooms on unruly horses in the rear. To some this was the prelude to a few hours of business in the City, or to Parliament. The M.P.s strolled down to Westminster after luncheon. They took their parliamentary life seriously, as they did all other occupations; but in those days Parliament partook of the nature of a respectable club rather than of an exacting, whole-time career.

The meeting of some philanthropic society, or an 'at home' at the house of a mutual friend was generally the sequel, and then they all returned to the same sort of home, to the stately and well-appointed drawing-rooms, with the brocade cushions and the chandeliers and the plush ottomans. They all had the children down after tea, they all had a nap before dinner. They dined out pretty frequently in each other's houses, and in those days dinners were long and heavy. This society was nothing if not domestic. The younger children often appeared before dinner, resplendent in sashes and locketts, for the kindly inspection of old family friends, and footmen with shining calves of white silk and blue plush breeches lent decorum to the scene;

powder was dying out in the eighties. About eleven o'clock the families went off in their broughams to the evening-party beloved of that age, the 'squash,' where society of a certain age and without dancing daughters foregathered at midnight for the enjoyment of each other's society and champagne. The entertainments were taken seriously. They could no more be neglected than could Parliament, or the partridges. The Foreign Office, or even Devonshire House, required a full hour to ascend the staircase alone, so great was the crowd; and it was generally the small hours of the morning before the family fought its way back to the brougham in a spent and bedraggled condition.

This society was at home in Kensington and Belgravia rather than in Mayfair. Mayfair represented other strata, the more purely aristocratic classes, the smart set *par excellence* also. Mayfair was a little suspected by a soberer world. Its doings were reported in *The World* and *Modern Society*; Belgravia's only in the *Times* and the *Morning Post*. The profession of politics was nothing if not respectable. To be a Member of Parliament was a gentlemanly pursuit like the Army or the Diplomatic Service. There was no outcry yet against the party system. Of course we had our political black sheep. There

was Joe Chamberlain—before the days of the ‘Veldt’—there was even the unmentionable Bradlaugh. But they were few, and they served to throw into relief the uniform respectability of the venerable political leaders to whichever party they belonged.

Chelsea again was socially distinct from Belgravia. It constituted yet another stratum. It was intellectual, artistic, a little suspected of Bohemianism. The new houses being built in the nineties aped the old styles; they had a countrified look about them, an almost rustic appearance. They deviated suspiciously from the orthodox type of town-house. They suggested that institution of the twentieth century, the week-end cottage. They had open fire-places, polished boards without carpets, front halls with chimney-corners. The front halls of Belgravia admitted of no deviation from type. They were furnished according to unvarying standards. There was the hat and umbrella-stand, the salver for visiting-cards, the stone floor, the dusty palm in its pot. The long pile-carpeted staircase arose opposite the door, and the butler’s broad back ascended it with a dignity born of long tradition. Could he possibly have kept his character, that immaculate figure, noiseless of foot, sleek of manner, on the slippery boards of the Chelsea



front halls? The man with a 'stake in the country' did not live in Chelsea.

The dwellers in Belgravia and Kensington were the classes who counted for most in the late Victorian days. It was they who stood for wealth, for respectability, for that sense of duty to others which Tennyson had immortalised. They embodied the ideals of the age. Philanthropy and politics were their prime concerns, but certain captains of industry were admitted to the close preserve, directors of railways and mining companies, and of course bankers and brewers. For by some strange freak of social etiquette bankers and brewers were admitted on equal terms to the society from which cotton or cocoa merchants were tacitly excluded; as were stockbrokers, doctors, and solicitors. The one represented the bedrock foundation of stable economic life in England, the other bore the special ægis of the State.

No class of society was more closely allied than this with the oldest of the vested interests in England. It was connected by marriage and by county-interests with the rights and traditions of aristocracy, with the landed estates, with the Church; but it combined these connections with some measure of practical interest in the great industrial concerns.

According to Victorian standards there was

nothing narrow or *borné* in this society. It seemed in its own eyes, and not in its own alone, to be the backbone of the country ; and half unconsciously it protected its frontiers rigidly. It was susceptible to any encroachment on its preserves. A decided shock was experienced, for instance, when the daughter of a former Under-Secretary, a peer with well-known traditions of public life, was asked in marriage by a young Radical M.P. from the North, the son of a well-known wool merchant. His Eton and Oxford education, even his mastership of the hounds, availed him little. The young lady's mother went the round of her friends, imploring their advice in the delicate situation that had arisen. It was humiliating to acquaint them with the fact, yet she was ready to forgive something — not everything — for the ample means involved. In the end the aspiring gentleman was sent about his business.

The disinterestedness of this class it was impossible to impugn. It was rich ; its standard of comfort was high ; and though it had none of the gilded opulence of cosmopolitan Hebrew society, since so familiar in London, it was securely independent of money considerations. Its family life was exemplary. The ladies were like-minded with their husbands, content with the state of life into which Providence had been

pleased to call them, deeply conscious of the responsibilities of their position. They were intelligent, engaged in good works, intent on setting example to servants and social inferiors. They carried the traditions of *noblesse oblige* into the political and business circles to which their lords and masters belonged, for on the whole they represented a more aristocratic class than their husbands. Their daughters were highly educated according to current standards, physically splendid, irreproachable in manners. To suppose them engaged in an aimless round of balls and Hyde Park parading was to malign them. In the country they worked in the village; they carried on night-schools and Sunday-classes; wood-carving and iron-work for boys were coming into fashion. In London they patronised East End institutes for working girls.

This was the day of embryonic ladies' debating societies; in a quiet way, of ladies' social clubs. Imbued, many of them, with a sense of responsibility to their fellows, especially to the village at home, they deliberately used their opportunities in London that they might be useful to others in the long winters in the country. King's College for women had been recently opened, and the more emancipated spirits of Belgravia sought there to taste the



sweets of higher education. Alone, or in the company of their mothers, they attended lectures on history and literature. A whole queue of broughams was marshalled in Kensington Square of an autumn evening, and the College played a part in bringing to girls, who by tacit social consent were excluded from the women's colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, the intellectual crumbs of the university.

At the same time Toynbee Hall and Canon Barnett were exercising an altruistic influence on upper-class circles. It was a wholly new idea in those days that friendly intercourse with the working-class was possible, much less indeed desirable. It had never been suspected that any but a School Board education would be demanded by those classes. But the success of Toynbee Hall and the Working Men's College revealed unexpected desires. Mrs. Humphry Ward and the Passmore Edwards Settlement touched a somewhat wider fringe of society, less orthodox theologically, but equally serious in the sense of moral obligation. There was a distinct stirring of the social consciousness in the nineties. But there was nothing to indicate the social ferment to which this was the quite harmless prelude. No one had begun to feel in the least uncomfortable.

It was late in the century before the artistic

revolution which was already permeating more bourgeois circles reached Belgravia. But it had begun to attend the Saturday Pops in the eighties, and the oratorios of the Albert Hall. The Academy and the Old Masters were mainly social events, but Agnew's Gallery, and Doré's, provided real æsthetic nourishment. The establishment of the new Tate Gallery and the Wallace Collection were memorable innovations, for Watts and Burne-Jones were the more daring contemporaries of that age and took the place of the Futurists and Cubists of to-day. Of the experiments and the controversies of art-life on the Continent Belgravia and Kensington were blissfully unconscious. They had their own standards and admired their own taste. An artist still smacked to them of something *risqué*.

Until the eighties no crucial political issue had divided these friendly social circles. The old distinctions between Tory and Whig had made no social cleavage. Toryism was growing into modern Conservatism, and the Whigs were now the Liberals; but Liberalism was only a step in advance of Conservatism, and that chiefly in the realm of constitutional change. Society was still mentally homogeneous, little intellectually distracted by political issues. But in the early eighties a political wedge was

driven into its compact body. Then for the first time London 'society' ranged itself into two parties, opposed not in opinion only but in principle and ideal, and modern Liberalism was born. Home Rule for Ireland was the logical consequence of the championship of nationality which Gladstone had inaugurated in the Midlothian Campaign; and for a generation it symbolised the issues at stake.

There followed a rapid development on the side of the Left. It was Canon Scott Holland with his Christian Social Union who, through the fashionable pulpits of the West End, was responsible for the first sleepless nights in that quarter, the first timid questionings as to the eternal stability of the social order. The influence of the Sidney Webbs and Fabianism in the background was unsuspected, and their influence never directly penetrated Belgravia.

Those who had split on the question of the Union tended more and more to diverge on all questions. To be a Gladstonian Liberal meant something quite definite: it meant taking a decided line, and incurring some measure at least of social disapprobation. It was irreconcilable with the traditional ideas of 'the Classes.' The cleavage widened. The Home Rulers were the would-be subverters of all established institutions. They approved the

godless School Boards ; they wanted the Church disestablished, the Constitution tinkered with ; they stood for free-thought, a free Press, free-trade. But it was the principle of nationality and their stand for it which, in the dawn of the twentieth century, culminated in the fierce resentment of financial and cosmopolitan interests, and brought Joseph Chamberlain and his ' limitless veldt ' into the limelight. The imagination of the prosperous and leisured classes was easily captured. Imperialism with its splendid conceptions of service and obligation, Jingoism, its shoddy counterfeit, the ' white man's burden ' and squalid commercialism, these were at issue in the public mind with the growing sense of the claims of nationality. England had never been deeply infected with the enthusiasm for that sense in Europe. The glamour that surrounded Garibaldi and Kossuth had shed but a transitory reflection, and in the beginning of the twentieth century we were growing increasingly conscious of our Colonial responsibilities, our Imperial destiny. Rudyard Kipling was voicing the popular sentiments.

To the classes favoured by birth and fortune, the claims of small nations savoured of something dowdy. They suggested the Nonconformist Chapel—worse still, the Nonconformist

conscience. 'Nationality' was a word not loved in the drawing-rooms of Belgravia. And England had no household to set in order. She had no Alsace-Lorraine, no Macedonia, no Finland. To question her right, her consummate ability to rule over 'natives,' was disloyalty. It was affectation too. As to Ireland, it was all the fault of the Americans—of 'the agitators.' Better-class England saw nothing in the case of Ireland to suggest Poland. With the South African War the matter acquired fresh significance. Imperialism *versus* Nationality was the electioneering cry of 1900, and the Pro-Boers were generally to be found in the ranks of the Home Rulers. The Boer War pushed yet further the wedge of disintegration.

Even among those who supported the war there were qualms of conscience. Many of them were ill at ease in the *milieu* of commercial Imperialism. There was indignant repudiation of 'diamonds' as the root-cause of the war. There was romantic idealisation of Cecil Rhodes. The cheap tawdriness of Jingoism was draped round and veiled with emotional ardour, an almost religious fervour.

Ireland and the South African War did something to break up the complacent 'unity' of English society. But questions of

this nature, political issues of any sort, could not do more than ruffle the surface. The supreme test of social relationships lies in the economic sphere. Only then, when to take the side of the wage-earners means, in common parlance, to 'rob your neighbour,' to 'turn traitor to your class,' does the cleavage between parties widen sensibly. This did not happen till 1909. But then old friends passed each other in Hyde Park without a greeting, and the riding parties in the Row dropped steadily out of fashion.



## THE AGE OF MORRIS-DANCING





## CHAPTER III

### THE AGE OF MORRIS-DANCING

FOR many years before the war we had heard a great deal about the rural problem. It was nearly forty years since we had given the labourer the vote ; nearly thirty since we had beguiled him with the dream of 'three acres and a cow.' Since then he had sunk back again into his familiar oblivion, returned to the mists and the mud of his fields, the squalid obscurity in which for ages he has dragged out his monotonous existence. Periodical efforts to galvanise him into life there had been, but they had but a passing success. There had been the age of the night-school and the mothers' meeting. Village institutes and lending-libraries had succeeded them. We had hoped great things from the setting up of parish councils ; and when allotments were started, we foresaw the return of Merrie England complete. But we were disappointed. They had failed to put new life into the old bottles. Except for the village intellectuals, who read the *Daily Mail* in the reading-room, all news-

papers were given up as waste of money. Now we saw that the villages were not going to be raised by efforts from outside. We had tried to do them good, to instruct, to refine them: and the response had been disappointing. We must try yet a new plan. The villagers must enjoy themselves. It must not be all lessons; they should play too. So we procured them a field for cricket or football, we gave them draught-boards and billiard-tables in the Institute, bagatelle and backgammon. But here again, after the opening ceremony, the games degenerated into chaos; the billiard balls were lost, the cards torn, the cues broken.

We began to despair. Would nothing interest these rustics? Would nothing civilise them, redeem their bovine lives? This was the psychological moment for Cecil Sharp and the Morris-dancers. Here was a genuine revival of Old England and its merriment. Surely this would provide the clue we were looking for. The source of the movement was the intellectual middle-class; it was independent of Hall and Parsonage. That was all to the good; it had no savour of propaganda for Church, or general elections. It brought together classes who had never joined for recreation before. It was just what we

wanted, a new source, a new direction of interest. Let us make an end of the old methods. Away with the tracts and the temperance meetings, away with the village concerts and entertainments, with all the old activities of parson and squire. The foundations of their works were rotten ; the conditions they assumed in the village had passed away, the feudalism and serfdom, even the reflections of Victorian industrialism in rural submissiveness. These things had all disappeared. We wanted new inspiration now, new leaders.

We found them at the Universities, and among the *intelligentsia*. Enthusiastic students of folk-lore scoured the countryside for old songs and dances ; spent long evenings in public-houses and on the village green. And by the genius of Cecil Sharp they saw their coveted booty transmuted into song and dance which delighted the intellectuals of Chelsea and Kensington. Then back to the villages with the sun-bonnets and the ribbons, and the dances on the green in the evening, and the strange new sensation these things awoke, the surprise of an unwonted sense of fellowship, of simple pleasures which all could share.

The same class had inaugurated the ' simple-life ' movement and the week-end cottage. Cecil

Sharp and Mary Neal were the æsthetic counterparts of Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells. The movement was one in origin. Instinctively, if unconsciously, it was the first attempt to capture the village for the new enlightened ideas of the emancipated middle-classes. The movement was bound to lose in conscious social direction in the process ; for, to compete in the countryside with the old institutions, squire and parson must be captured too ; and by the time the movement had caught on in the villages there was little conscious intention among its instigators. It was out for enjoyment pure and simple—not for any ulterior purpose.

The movement spread like wild-fire in some districts. Its possibilities were much greater than those of its precursors. The folk-songs had been sung by the peasant ancestry ; in some places they had never really died out. They came more naturally to rustic lips than did the strains of *Gaudeamus*, or even the *Plantation Songs*, with which we had beguiled the village lads of twenty years before. The girls donned the sun-bonnets and the aprons to the manner born. The Squire's daughter and the dairy-maid established a new relationship, genuine, if superficial. It was shorn to some extent of condescension on one side, of obsequiousness on the other. On the sunlit

lawns of the Hall, on the uneven grass of the village green, they danced together. The village lads joined in, and in their holidays from Eton 'the young gentlemen' from the Hall took part. It was a new sensation for the country gentry. They had never felt so modern, so democratic, so up-to-date. Who could say they were blind to the modern trend of social currents? They were allied with a big and pregnant movement. It was organised from the University, and they had fallen into line, as the upper-classes always do in any movement for the real good of the countryside. There was a sense of good fellowship about the whole thing; a happy neighbourliness. The boys and girls came in to the Hall to be dressed in smocks and bells and ribbons. The Squire's wife had collected them from her friends' nurseries and lumber-rooms.

The movement was certainly an improvement upon the village concert and the night-school; even upon the boys' club. They had been provided by Hall and Parsonage for the good of those beneath them. Here the people had to take part themselves, or the thing was a failure. The Morris-classes provided a great deal of genuine enjoyment. The gay swing about the old melodies set the feet itching to dance; and the 'White Paternoster' at the end,



with its quaint invocation of the Saints, its subtle appeal to mediæval lore, removed it for ever from the vulgar atmosphere of the school-treat with its swings and donkeys, its drawling Doxology, its stale buns. But the advocates of the Morris movement were mistaken in regarding it as a panacea for the abuses of village life. The intellectuals of the middle-class are as far removed, and further in natural sympathy from the villagers, as are parson and landlord, and they will make no deeper impression on village life. Mediæval revivals will effect no radical improvement. Morris-dancing is a palliative ; it is not a cure. Nor are even co-operative pigs.

Economic independence is the absolute essential for the revival of village life and the successful growth of native art. And the revival when it comes is bound to wear a different aspect to that of the past. It is by no means certain that May-poles and Morris-dancing will provide its setting. Whether it will retain the old loyalties, will depend on the new social relationships which the next few years will determine.

As yet there has been no genuine yearning on the part of the countryman for his long-lost arts. What Hodge wants is the cinema and the gramophone. They need no mental application ;

he can sit and dream in semi-consciousness while comic picture and catchy refrain pass half unheeded before his mind. The one thing he resents is an intellectual effort ; hard manual labour, the crowded chaos and squalor of his home leave him no opportunity for concentration, no leisure for creation in art or craft. But when the time comes and with greater leisure and security he revives his native art, he will create it himself ; it will depend on no benevolent squire nor academic enthusiast. All sorts of sturdy native growths may be looked for then ; and they will be fresh and original, with the promise of something permanent about them, no servile imitation of the past. They will bear the impress of the contemporary order, not of the mediæval.

*Note.*—Since the above was written the war has upset all calculations as to the gradual evolution of the new social and economic order. Great and vital changes may be coming more suddenly than we ever contemplated. Society as we have known it is crumbling in many different parts of Europe. England is not altogether exempt, and by the action of infectious and destructive causes, stages of social development may be omitted which in normal times we should regard as inevitable.





## THE OLD HALL



## CHAPTER IV

### THE OLD HALL

UP the hill, beyond the crimson and orange of the dogwood and willow, away from the quaint formalities of the Old Hall garden, and we are up on the rough knoll with its pale red bracken—far-flung sentinel of the fir-clad hills that line the coast. With scarce a foreground, it overlooks the broken cliff and the misty sea beyond, ‘a little line of sportive wood run wild.’ February has far gone, but the long snows have barely melted, and there was a frost last night. In the first burst of spring sunshine it glistens still on the filmy green of the gorse bushes, the faded silvery moss under one’s foot, the battered fronds of the bracken.

The winter has been hard this year, hard and dark and long. There are wrecks on the shore, there are dead birds on the fields, there are hungry gulls around the homesteads. But the sun has come at last, and the melting of the snows, though there is still the cold breath in the air from lurking drifts under the hedges.

The groups of thorn bushes are twittering with birds, those who have escaped the cold. A redbreast is hiding there, his dowdy winter russet turned to flame—the real fairy-book robin; and in the still colourless maze of the larches the tits are at play. One flies across the open, pearl, opal, green, mauve. Around the bracken stand the Scotch firs, their sombre green lit up by the sunlit rose of the branches. Beneath and beyond them is the misty nothingness where the quiet sea lies, half asleep it seems, and quiet at last after its long buffeting. There is the broken line of cliff that wavers uncertainly into the distance, the fisherman's cottage clinging to it, and away to the north is Rinkleboro', the bold bare hill which, like nothing else in this cheerful countryside, gives the touch of severity; a close-cropped cone where even the twigs of stunted gorse are nibbled by the moving sheep. The wind always blows up there, and a hawk hovers over it, hungry. It frowns on the valleys below with their contented farmyards, their quiet pastures; on the great stretch of broken country all drenched in sun and wet with mist; on the sudden hollow of a gravel pit or deep sandy lane, little undulations where tiny copses nestle, and snug stone farms take shelter at their sides. Ragged spurs of the wood run right down into the fields, and green bits of common

with watercress rills and homely geese are set among the red roofs of the village ; right up into the heart of the woods too.

And there is the English village itself, a little bit of England's heart, demure, secure, a thing of repose and ancient dignity, complete and self-contained. The Hall stands there among its oak trees, itself only the largest of the farms that surround the green. The lowering sun plays in its diamond windows ; there is deep-rooted ease in the lines of its wall and roof. Surely it grew there, flint from the seashore, clay from the field hard by, massive oak from the wood ; and round it, tended lovingly, are the lines of the quaint yews, the little lawn with its birds, the promise of all the summer glory of this garden by the sea. The cottages of the fisherfolk with their red roofs are just outside the garden, the common with its pond still shining with wet ice ; you can hear the shrill voices of the school-children who are splashing on it, for the last time this winter.

Between the village and the wooded hills over there is the pale stubble of the fields, the brownly purple of the plough where a dim flutter of white reveals the hungry gulls, the faint sun-flecked pasture where the cattle are turning home. In spite of the winter ravages, the land shows up bravely in the sunshine.

Far away in the mist it catches the pale corn-yellow of a stack in the open field; a suggestion of pearly white and delicate mauve is the sheep browsing at the turnip heap. Up by the woods they are burning the weeds, and the smoke rises still and blue against the fir trees, filling the air with its pungency. Beyond it, right in the heart of the wood, there is a field still quite white with snow and blue with deep shadows where the sun has not reached at all. There is a nip in the air, the nip of frost, of salt from the sea.

A mouse—or a mole was it?—stirs the bracken, and like a flute the first song of spring bursts from the thorn behind me. It is the February thrush. In spite of all that man has done to mock it in the last sad years, the appeal goes home still. ‘The rapture of the forward view,’ he sings, ‘the young time with the life ahead,’—the old eternal melody; and free as he, and as glad, is the voice in the lane below, a boy’s voice, clear and gay and chattering. ‘Was it the same covey really?’—and a boy’s straight figure moves with swinging steps across the stubble—a vision of supple grace, of eager joy in life, a boy with a wisp of thick hair over his brow, and sea-blue eyes that laugh. He and the thrush are holding holiday to-day. ‘Young blood beats everywhere,’ and spring is on the way.

THE COUNTRY-TOWN  
A POOR CHOICE





## CHAPTER V

### A POOR CHOICE

‘OLD Halls’ and picturesque villages are all very well; but for a variety of ill-defined reasons the labourer is often ill-content with both, and it frequently happens that he drifts at last to the country-town. The immediate cause may be the house shortage. But over and beyond that perpetual stimulus to migration, the fact is Hodge finds that life in the village can satisfy him no longer. It is too dull, too monotonous; half unconsciously his instincts revolt at the relics of feudalism which still cling to it. Even Morris-dancing and a village library are not inducement enough.

So at length the day comes when Hodge reaches Clayberswick—the country-town in the neighbourhood, and deposits his family and his goods and chattels in a cobbled back-yard. The rent of the few modern workmen’s houses is beyond the reach of his income, and his destined lodging is damp and insanitary, deficient in every convenience. It is a back-to-back house

too, and never gets a draught of air through it. But there are compensations. There is a minimum of interference with his personal affairs, and this is a most desirable condition to Hodge, shy of being inspected, suspicious of those who want to do him good. If he is cumbered with many children—and the country labourer generally is—he dreads more than anything else interference with his personal habits and morals. There is good measure of it in the village under the eye of the Hall; more still in the city under an efficient Local Authority. Here in the country-town Medical Officers and Sanitary Inspectors appear but seldom; even School-attendance Officers are lenient. There are no Care-Committee officials to interfere with his children's health; there is no campaign against 'sore eyes' or 'verminous heads.' The Education Committee can always be trusted to give his son a leaving certificate at eleven or twelve, and then he will earn good wages as a caddy on the golf links, or as errand-boy in the town. There are no continuation classes to limit the freedom of the elder children; above all there is no C.O.S. to make officious investigations into his income and his morals. Nothing exists to impede the traditional flow of credulous charity. It is clear there are advantages in a change of residence; and the

country-town offers something which the city does not possess.

Of course there are corresponding disadvantages ; Hodge soon discovers them. He has a long walk to his work every morning, five or six miles it may be, and in all weathers ; no question for him of train or bicycle. His children sicken more easily than of old, and doctors' bills are an added vexation to life, albeit there is little question of paying them. When they leave school, his girls are drawn perforce into one or other of the few employments the town can offer. There is not much variety—a steam-laundry it may be, a little scent factory, a skin-curing business. Domestic service is not 'the thing' for girls in Clayberswick. It must be admitted that Hodge is not always quite orthodox on the subject of inspectors. The hours for the girls are long ; there is incredible overtime in the summer months at the laundry, and often they stand all day on a wet floor and develop attacks of rheumatism at fifteen or sixteen. For the 4s. or 5s. a week, which was the usual wage in pre-war days, it is a poor return. Nobody has attempted to organise trades unions for the girls, and unless the Factory Inspector happens to come, which he does but once in a blue moon, their complaints are never formu-

lated or voiced. Hodge would not say so to his pals, but in his heart of hearts he wishes the Inspector came more often. At night the girls run wild on the streets, and when they come in, they clearly resent his enquiries. Hodge feels uneasy sometimes. His own mother had put him early to bed as a child. But then she had been a nurse in a gentleman's family, and the tradition had sunk deep. His wife thinks her old-fashioned.

The country-town has few of the meretricious attractions of the city to offer. There are no flamboyant gin-palaces to enliven Saturday night ; no Picture Palace. The better-class districts of the town possess even fewer attractions for Hodge. They are too respectable, too monotonous : and the tone is unfriendly.

Hodge has never been his own master ; he drifts about wherever the breath of fear or fortune blows him, and since through long experience of tilling the soil his hand knows no other cunning, he sticks to the old trade though he changes his residence. He distrusts new enterprises, to acquire new habits would disturb him profoundly ; his mind works slowly. He will not go to the great city, for he would feel clumsy and stupid there, confused, an easy prey to the commercial sharks who lie in wait for him at every corner,

and tempt him to his ruin by buying furniture or gold watches on the instalment system. He will be more at home in the country-town.

The rent is only 2s. a week for a house in a back-yard off the main street. This is tempting ; but the prospect is anything but cheerful when Hodge first takes possession there. The yard is eighteen feet across, a row of wooden latrines obscures the view, and in the middle, as it is cobbled, the grease and refuse can never be removed. The house has one room downstairs, and a dark scullery behind it. Two minute bedrooms open out on either side of the top landing, and the draught that sweeps upstairs is unimpeded by doors. The water comes through the roof of the boys' room, but Hodge knows, without being advised, it is better to say nothing about it. Large families are not approved by landlords. It is wise for their parents to keep in the background ; to make themselves conspicuous by unnecessary demands would be impolitic. Besides, the owners of house property in the town do not lend a willing ear to claims for repairs. Nor are the tenants expected to be over particular about the property themselves. So there are mutual advantages. Even if a house does get condemned as ' unfit for human habitation ' by a half-hearted Local Authority,



an easy feint of tears from Hodge's wife will generally secure that the closing order is remitted. You cannot turn families out into the streets, and there are no superfluous houses.

Of course theoretically Hodge has his remedy for such abuses. Bad landlords and damp houses can be dealt with through the medium of the vote. It is not a prompt remedy, but if many Hodges combined to vote for the reformer at the Municipal Elections there would soon be a clearance of slums and all other urban abuses. The 'unfit' houses would be closed by the 'Council,' and the possibilities of the Housing Acts discovered. The Local Authority is ultimately responsible for Hodge's health and his comfort.

But for the present he is looked at askance if he displays any undue interest in disposing of his vote for the Town Council. The local elections are infinitely remote from himself and his interests; in a muddled way he sees them for what they really are, the battle-field of competing vested interests. He ceases to wonder at the number of local builders who monopolise so many seats on the Council. He sees nothing more than a coincidence in the Chairman himself and many of the members being owners of the most insanitary back-

yards, the most tumble-down houses in the town. He accepts without suspicion the decaying property around him : the leaky walls, the unremoved refuse of old fires, the heaps of rubbish. New model houses spring up in the big cities ; even the villages look smart and trim when an efficient landlord takes them in hand. But the country-town seems always forgotten, left out, not worth bothering about. It may

### *Erratum*

P. 59, lines 11 and 10 from bottom, *for* Bank-up clerks, &c., *read* Bank-clerks and the smaller tradesmen snap them up, &c.

### *De Bunsen's Old and New in the Countryside*

likes of him do not live up there. Bank-up clerks and the smaller tradesmen snap them even before they are built. Small families are *de rigueur*.

Where then is Hodge to turn when he finds himself adrift for the first time in the small town, the new and bewildered citizen of an unknown community ? Where can he grasp a helping hand ? In the city there would be a College Settlement ; friendly undergraduates would seek to enlist him for 'socials' and



lectures ; there would be a Boys' Brigade or the Scout Movement for the boys, Girls' Club and Y.W.C.A. for the girls. In the village, at least there would be the Squire with his long tradition of bounty, the Vicar, familiar to every cottage. But in the small town nobody cares what happens to him, nobody wants him ; and his face soon betrays the fact. It takes on an expression of peculiar sullenness, a look of dull resentment which repels his neighbours and distresses his would-be benefactors. Sour, ungracious, ill at ease, Hodge at sea in the country-town presents a type which it is hard to beat for its pitiful unattractiveness.

Of course there are the clergy. The small town is full of churches and chapels. Clay-berswick with four thousand inhabitants boasts two Anglican churches—one of them the half-empty memorial of past glories, when the town was an important centre.

The rector of the parish will pay Hodge a call in the first year of his residence. The rector's wife will invite Mrs. Hodge to join the Mothers' Meeting, and her family the Sunday School. In illness, Hodge will follow custom and send a child to the Rectory for assistance ; and from the Poor Fund he will periodically receive spasmodic charity. He will get a bite of something in a crisis—a pint

of gruel for his wife, a peck of apples for the children.

The Church runs a Maternity Society for its members. From this source Hodge's wife, when she bears her second child—not be it noted her first—will receive a daily bowl of gruel and a sack of coals ; the loan of sheets too, and a set of baby-garments. These things are not to be despised, and they constitute an undeniable reason for membership of the Anglican Church.

Mrs. Hodge will be asked for a subscription to the Clothing Club. Here again there are discreet allusions to the subject of first babies. But the difficulty has ceased to be acute in her case, for Mrs. Hodge is expecting her seventh child, and she has already reared the satisfactory proportion of four out of six, without any such assistance.

There are distinct advantages in joining the Mothers' Meeting. It implies two good teas a year, and an annual excursion to the seaside. And it is politic to be enrolled, though Mrs. Hodge finds it difficult to keep Thursdays free from more pressing claims, Thursday is her one clear day in the week. Monday is washing, Tuesday mending, Wednesday market, Friday cleaning up for Sunday, and Saturday belongs to the children, for they are at home from school all day, and,

beyond the cooking and tubbing, there is not time for anything. Thursday supplies the one chance of doing all the odd jobs, which take so much time and have so little to show for themselves. If there has been a medical inspection in the school Mrs. Hodge will almost certainly have received a notice from the School Authorities informing her that one of her children is suffering from astigmatism or short-sight, from enlarged glands or 'general debility.' His eyes must be tested for glasses. That must be done at Newton, five miles away, and there is no admittance to the Hospital, even to the out-patients' department, without a subscriber's 'recommend'; nor can a 'recommend' be procured without an appeal to charity. This involves calling on the 'ladies.' Mrs. Hodge has no idea who are the subscribers. She only knows she must spend weary hours, many Thursdays it may be, in tramping round from one 'lady' to another, from rectory to villa, and villa to country-house, and country-house to large farm. It is a nerve-racking process. She is scared by the prim parlour-maid, who looks her up and down suspiciously; she wastes endless precious minutes at the door, or in the cold back-regions, while the 'lady' is looked for; or she hangs about the road until 'the lady'

comes home to tea. Mrs. Hodge's success will largely depend on the season of the year—most subscribers' 'recommends' are disposed of by the autumn—and on the correctness of her demeanour to 'the ladies.' But everything comes to him who waits, and at last the Thursday arrives when, armed with the paper guarantee of his worthiness to be treated, she and the child arrive at the out-patients' department of the Hospital. Eye-cases always predominate, and queues of mothers and children await admittance to the doctor's room. The likelihood is that Johnny will get no attention that day. It may be many successive Thursdays before his turn comes ; or it may be sooner if his case has so wrought on the sympathies of the 'lady' that she has written the doctor a personal note. The result of the diagnosis will be a prescription for the Care Committee, through which agency the County Council provides cheap glasses to school-children ; or it may mean indoor-treatment at the infirmary itself. Then there is the waiting for a bed, and that sometimes runs into months. And when at last the boy is installed in the children's ward, there will be the weekly visit to see him. So Mrs. Hodge's attendance at the Mothers' Meeting will not be as regular as the rector's wife was led to expect.

The Primrose League is a rival solicitor for Mrs. Hodge's activities. The success of the Primrose League in the country-town is generally the measure of the town's social and political independence. Where rents and wages are low and housing is poor, where charity and the Poor Law combined are joint dispensers of the bounty that keeps poor homes together, there the Dames of the Primrose League will find a happy hunting-ground ; there annual teas and meetings will be largely and enthusiastically attended. There is no mistake about it. Mrs. Hodge genuinely appreciates sitting next to Her Ladyship at tea. She really thrills when she sees her baby on the aristocratic knee. In the city the event would hardly be chronicled in these democratic days. In the village long custom has bred familiarity with the scene. But in the annals of the country-town such an incident is still recorded.

The country-town is the last stronghold of the vested interests. In the village disruptive forces have been at work. Agitators with ' back-stairs methods ' have carried out ' land enquiries.' In the view of the Hall they have done irretrievable harm. Already there is quite a different atmosphere in the reading-room ; even at the Mothers' Meeting it makes itself felt. The Squire's wife can feel no



longer that the village is her natural preserve. In the city again Trades Unions and political meetings, Co-operative Societies and social clubs, have gone far to educate in independence. But the country-town falls between two stools. It is always left out by social reformers. There are schemes for rural reconstruction, the revival of life and industries in the village, for slum-clearing and housing in the city. The country-town is left to stagnate. Nobody wants to live there because the place is desirable in itself. It is only a means to an end. The professional man who settles there is still on the lowest rung of the ladder, or else he is at the end of his career. Workmen who cannot pay an economic rent and dare not compete with skilled labour in the city ; clergy who are passed over in the race for preferment ; labourers who are squeezed out of the village for want of houses ; girls who shun the familiar faces of home and seek the shelter of the common lodging-house ; the die-hard remnants of decaying industries ; these compose its population. It is not an inspiring company. But the little town does offer one supreme attraction. People here can ' keep themselves *to themselves*.' That is an advantage which makes many sacrifices worth while.





THE COUNTRY-TOWN  
A BACK-YARD



## CHAPTER VI

### A BACK-YARD

A LONG winding slope on which the afternoon sun of winter casts its pallid light, two grim rows of ancient houses, crowned with heavy tiles of moss-grown stone, this is the approach to Clayberswick. The high-pitched roofs picked out against the fading light, the glimpses of river and green fields between the chimneys, the tower of the ancient church, all suggest the peaceful past, the repose and seclusion of the old-world country-town. The little place has been famous in its day. Kings have halted here; Cardinal Wolsey once honoured the ancient inn. Picturesquely the old houses cling about the mound on which the town stands, built, some of them, right into the grey chalk, and hardly distinguishable from it, one rising above another in romantic confusion. On either side of the long ascending street, little cobbled ways form a raised footpath in front of the houses and closed-in outhouses beneath. Behind the rows of houses, leading off from the street by dark covered-in passages,

are the narrow back-lanes, the little cobbled courts, which constitute the larger part of Clayberswick. In and out of these grimy haunts, up and down the broken steps, into the road and back again, the children run and toddle and play and quarrel, all day long and half the night. For Christmas is near, and the schools are closed. An unkempt crowd it is, scrambling out to shout at a passing motor as it comes panting up the hill, gabbling off a snatch of local folk-song to extort a penny from a visitor ; quarrelling over the soiled crust or oily sardine tin flung out into the street. There are stalwart lads in the crowd, and girls with the bold step and rough red hair which denote a Scandinavian ancestry. But for the most part they are an ill-grown crowd—little, stunted creatures, with rickety legs and swollen glands, chapped hands, running noses. Into the poor little sweetshops on the hill, and back through the arched-in passages, they scuttle along the raised footpaths, tumbling into the street again, a ceaseless rabble of shrill-voiced children. All through the long, dark afternoon you can hear them, when the street lamps are lit at four o'clock, and mud and drizzle begrime every corner. Only a hundred yards off is the river, only a mile the sea ; the green fields and the woods are so near. Yet these children

are city-bred to look at ; in the back-yards the air is as stuffy as in a London slum.

Close and foetid is the one into which I have followed a little girl home. The space is narrow, and to-day is washing-day, so the lines that span the yard are full, and it is narrower still. Ragged shirts and petticoats hang limply in the airless dank. As I pick my way through the steaming lines to the battered door in the corner, the children scuttle away over the greasy floor of the cobbled yard. The air is heavy with odours, with grease and soap-suds and onions, with the refuse in the broken dustbins. There is the smell of the fried-fish shop round the corner and, pervading all the rest, the smell of the gas-works on the hill, which reaches every back-yard wherever the wind may come from in Clayberswick. Inside these close-packed houses it is always dark ; but the fading light of the short winter afternoon, and the steam from the clothes without, make it darker than usual. There are brown-paper patches in the broken windows. Children swarm in these yards because the respectable streets do not encourage large families. There the tenants are requested not to bring 'encumbrances' ; if they do they are soon ordered to 'abate the nuisance.' The worry involved in a front street is endless.

From the house I enter to-day a harsh, grating sound breaks through the hubbub of the yard. It is a man coughing—the sort of cough that spells decay. A big labourer—he is about forty—sits huddled over the fire; he holds a baby on his knee, and the regular wheeze of his breathing between the spasms of the cough seems to soothe the child with its monotony. The house was infected with phthisis before ever he took possession of it a year ago, and the dirt of countless dirty families has paralysed effectively his wife's attempts to cleanse it. No window is open; windows here are not made to open. But it makes little difference to the atmosphere, for the air outside is little more pure than the air within. It is a two-roomed house, as are all the houses in the yard. In the one bedroom upstairs the whole family sleep, huddled close together for warmth, consumptive father, anæmic mother, the three children, inevitably tainted. The blessings of the Insurance Act have been slow to penetrate the back-quarters of Clayberswick, and the new tuberculosis dispensary is five miles off. Even so, the family owes something to these belated institutions. The consumptive attends the dispensary as often as he can drag his weary limbs there, and survive the exhaustion of the cough and the

temptations of the 'public' on the way. The family exist somehow, albeit mysteriously. Two or three days' outside-washing brings in a little; scraps of charity are never lacking in Clayberswick. There are more or less irregular remittances from a sailor son. A hand-to-mouth existence it is, eked out at the cost of rickety, if not tuberculous, children, of the moral taint on which such conditions put a premium.

This is not the only victim of the yard. Two doors off is another invalid—a relic of the South African War. A neglected wound in the leg—gangrene, and amputation always threatening—a weakened constitution, the consolations of drink, such is the familiar sequence. The man is entitled to a meagre pension for his long-forgotten services to his country; and one of his girls earns 7s. a week at the steam laundry. A month ago he lost two children from the after-effects of measles. He and his wife make little pretence of regarding the event as a tragedy. It is obvious that the remaining three have benefited by the reduction of mouths to be fed, as well as by the new black clothes which kindly neighbours, jealous for the traditions of Clayberswick respectability, have provided. There are compensations for the loss. It means a new chance in life, a breaking of



its monotony. The customary attendance at church on the Sunday after the funeral, the new clothes, mark a turning-point. There is the renewed promise to send the children to Sunday School; there is the resulting invitation to the Sunday School treat with its heavy tea and its obviation of supper. In this case the Insurance Act was just in time 'to keep the home together.' To some reflective minds it is a doubtful blessing. The man lies on a greasy horsehair couch by the fire. When eyes are accustomed to the gloom, the holly can be seen hung over the pictures, the familiar floral texts, the indispensable photographs of 'grandad' and 'grandma' enlarged, in heavy gilt frames. The holly is 'a bit of Christmas'; no respectable household would dispense with it. Christmas is next week, and the sailor-boy is expected home; so a bit of cleaning-up is going on and the family is cheerful. They can afford to be patronising to the family in the yard over the road, a family decidedly further down the ladder than they are. It is no wonder indeed, for Mrs. Harkiss is laid up with her tenth child, and the twins of eleven months can neither walk nor crawl. To judge from appearances they are none of them destined long for this world; but for the moment they cumber the ground. It seems all babies indeed when I

enter, for the three- and four-year olds are scarcely bigger than the twins, and the girl of six is a cripple.

The mother is always ill herself, and every confinement saps more of her strength away. With ever-waning vigour she faces her home life. She had faced it bravely enough eleven years ago, when, in the parish church, she set her hand to the losing battle. For ill-health, low wages, a husband on the borderline of mental deficiency, have not given Mrs. Harkiss much of a chance in life. Now she has folded her hands as it were, and accepts her fate with a bovine indifference which is the despair of the district visitor and the taunt of respectable neighbours. However, the Harkiss family is an exception. No family sinks so low in Clayberswick but the Harkiss' have sunk lower still. They provide a standing consolation to families going downhill. They have plumbed a level no one else has reached. Nobody need despair as long as the Harkiss family survives in its dirt, its squalor, its lack of every means of a decent existence.

The Insurance Act has not yet solved the problem of the sick poor in Clayberswick. The expected benefits of other Acts have been equally slow of realisation. When the Mental Deficiency Bill had become law, we had looked

in Clayberswick for a serious grappling with an acute problem which is yet on a small and manageable scale. Provision was to be made for all cases in the county area: new institutions to be built at once to supplement existing ones, and special treatment provided. Yet in spite of the promises, the chronic adult cases lingered on in the Infirmary, the children in their own homes. Deficient girls still made their annual visit to the Workhouse, and returned with the baby to the slums to await the next 'event.'

In this very yard there is a victim. From the house next door to Mrs. Harkiss' a persistent wail is heard recurring, a sort of vacant howl like an animal in pain. Through all the varied noises, the shrill voices, the babies' crying, the visiting organ-grinder, that weird, inhuman sound persists. At the door a mother stands, with the moaning, pitiful being in her arms. The idiot boy is seven. He can do nothing for himself, neither walk, nor talk, nor eat. He clutches his head from time to time with both his hands as if it hurt him. He is very strong, and has to be fastened to his chair to prevent his falling, so heavy that his mother can do no more than drag him upstairs to bed at night, and down again in the grey morning to his chained existence.

She never leaves him. Day in, day out, she bears his wail. It has dug so deep into her soul that she is not conscious of it. But if the habit has inured her, the child's cry and grotesque appearance has goaded the neighbours in the yard to a condition of desperation. The morally superior realise the effect on their own children's imaginations. But chiefly it is the strain on nerves already overwrought by the squalid conditions in which they live. It has roused a dull and angry resentment against poor Mrs. Radford. It poisons the sources of kindly friendliness which can raise the meanest atmosphere of the slums. Suspicion and ill-will are rife. Malicious gossip and cruel insinuations rankle in Mrs. Radford's dull mind. Yet she herself is only the victim. Her husband, a brick-layer of notorious evil-living, brings week by week a pittance towards the family budget; his work is irregular, and depends on his immunity from drink at the moment. Besides, 10s. of his wages must go every week to support another family, an unrecognised one, at the other end of the town. For this reason the Guardians refuse to relieve him of his imbecile child. The Education Authorities, legally responsible as they are for children over seven, seek to shift their responsibility.

The Statutory Committee under the Mental Deficiency Act wrings its hands. It is afraid it may be years before there are sufficient institutions to take all the cases that cry out for specialised treatment. Patience, patience—Acts of Parliament will never reform the world. We must go back to charity, to begging at the Rectory, to trust in God. Such is the familiar conclusion—a counsel of despair.

The War put an end to even the tentative benefits of the Act; it made impossible the necessary investigations.

Clayberswick epitomises the problems of the city. It *is* the city in miniature. Yet because the problem is here a manageable one, because it is so far limited as to make it hopeful of solution and abundantly worth attacking, nobody troubles to attack it. The Clayberswicks of England are left on one side by social reformers. Yet they might provide just that scope for social experiment that is so necessary a guide to national schemes.

THE COUNTRY-TOWN  
HIGH STREET





## CHAPTER VII

### HIGH STREET

UP in High Street things look better. This is the important part of the town. All the credit, the security, the established comfort are here: here are the better-class shops, the two Banks, the Commercial Hotel where the farmers foregather on market-day; here is the Town Hall. The new buildings of the District Council stand in dignity at the corner of the Market Square. And at either end, where High Street blossoms forth into Park Terrace and Mandeville Place, are the quiet and sober residences of the local doctors, bankers, and solicitors—the old eighteenth-century houses, with their air of quaint and homely comfort, their grey-stone and mossy tiled roofs—respectability and modest well-being writ large on their stolid faces. And though dainty muslin curtains effectually screen the view from without, the figures that emerge from the brass-plated doors, the ladies in neat tailor-mades, the polished perambulators with the fur-smothered babies, tell a tale of solid

comfort within. Motors stand at these doors, and at night *recherché* little dinner-parties are given, with whist-drives to follow; at Christmas-time, a homely dance. This is the part of Clayberswick that really counts; the stationary, hard-working, middle-class element whose roots have struck deep. Their work and interests lie in the locality, their activities are essential to its well-being. There are strips of garden behind the houses. The old local families have lived there, some of them for more than two generations. Large play-rooms for the children have been built out behind; there are wide, panelled staircases. Many families have grown up in these houses, happy, contented families with no yearning for a wider horizon than Clayberswick itself could supply—father in his office or on his rounds, mother at parish-work when the household duties are over, children at the Grammar School; Christmas with the little dances and parties, the summer excursions to holiday resorts. The years pass, and the boy goes into the father's office, the daughter marries the doctor's son whom she played with at school; they in their turn rear similar happy families. So the circle goes round. For generations it contributed something substantial to the common weal; it brought its own sense of content and

well-being. Its ideals were early-Victorian, but in Victorian days they served their generation well. They provided something abiding and worthy in provincial life ; something which, at that period, appeared essential to the community. They justified themselves to their generation.

Farther along the road, where Park Terrace tails off into the main road, are the two or three capacious houses of the local magnates. Well back from the road they stand in their well-stocked gardens ; flamboyant glasshouses support them, and sometimes an approach with a lodge. Here is the wealthy fish-merchant, retired in well-appointed opulence to adorn our humble town ; here are the maiden ladies, last relics of the once all-important squire's family, when Clayberswick was still a country village. Here again is the well-known brewer from the nearest city, renowned for his charitable donations. Beyond them, florid in its new red brick, is the Grammar School ; and adorning the sloping descent to the river, the straggling desolation of the cemetery.

Except in the bustle of market-day, High Street is a place of quiet and leisurely business. The shopkeepers move about in unhurried fashion, engaging their customers in conversation which most effectively distracts their

attention from the shortcomings of the proffered wares. Mr. Jones the draper has run out of steel buttons or white tape ; so at the psychological moment he produces the 'very thing' in children's serges for the seashore, or cheap nun's veiling for winter nightgowns, and dexterously contrives to convince you that these are the very articles you were looking for. You will blush to complain of what is lacking when he recalls his past benefits. How your figure has improved in his 'non-fat' corsets ! how admired the silk blouse was in church last Sunday ; he had inveigled you into buying it ! At Mr. Grimes' the grocer the conversation is on a loftier scale. Mr. Grimes has a liking for 'petitions' in his shop window : no enthusiast for political or philanthropic causes—as long as they are on the right lines—ever called on him in vain. He welcomes all sorts, and there is always a goodly display. He invites signatures and explains the cause in the intervals of hunting for candles or dog-biscuits. You may find yourself deep in the iniquities of the Insurance Act or the last Education Bill before you can extricate yourself and your purchases from his shop. We never pay Mr. Grimes a visit unless we have ample time at our command.

Outside, an air of calm pervades the street.

The policeman stands chatting at the street corner with the familiar figure of the 'Cruelty to Children' Inspector ; the Rector cracks a joke at the Rectory gate with the sergeant of the local Territorials. Slowly the Medical Officer of Health moves down the hill, arm-in-arm with the Relieving Officer, and the Chairman of the Education Committee stands at the door of his ironmonger's shop and smiles benignly at the passer-by. There is a kindly atmosphere about High Street and its environs. There are the old familiar faces, the old venerable ways ; Tuesday's market, Wednesday's meeting of the Guardians, Thursday's early-closing, Sunday's church bells. There is a sense of being at home there, a sense of security, a touching faith in its judgment. The citizens trust High Street ; they trust it to oppose new and dangerous things—quixotic reforms in the town, the building of a new Council School, the appointment of an Infant Life Protection Visitor. It keeps to the good old paths ; it covers up the nuisances, protects the vested interests. It upholds the honour of the place as a reputable resort for quiet holiday-makers ; it resists with the whole weight of its established authority disloyal attempts to expose its sores, to drive away its money.

In Summertown it is different. Summer-



town is the suburb which lies to the west of the town. No such confidence can be reposed there. There is no harmony in Summertown ; none of the traditional unity of Clayberswick. The very houses express its conflicting ideas. A bewildering jumble of villas it is, aggressive villas, with jarring architectural features and redundant excrescences in every direction. High Street resents these vagaries as derogatory to its dignity and distrusts the new-comers ; it will have nothing to do with them. They mean disturbances and unrest, higher rates, squabbles on the Town Council. There is perpetual friction between the two, between new and pushing Summertown and homely, dignified High Street. The growing prosperity of Summertown is sneered at, its residents criticised as intruders and parvenus. There is a spontaneous outcry if in Clayberswick one of its residents is proposed to fill an office of importance in the town—Churchwarden, Secretary of the Primrose League, Chairman of Guardians. Of course much of the spice of life in Clayberswick consists of this friction ; life would be very dull without it.

Summertown is composed of a long road with detached villas on either side. They dwindle into ‘ semi-detached ’ as the road winds away into the valley, and the occupants descend

in the social scale. The houses are chaotic—in material, in colour, in style. There is red brick and yellow stone ; there is wood and roughcast. There are houses castellated, houses gabled, houses pinnaced. There are typical suburban houses ; there are garden-city rustic houses ; there are fantastic houses which no responsible locality would care to own. A retired butcher owns this florid residence in red brick ; a rising clerk on the railway this prim stone-faced villa with high-pitched roof of purple slate. In this garden is a clump of artificial ruins ; in that a Chinese pagoda for pigeons. And equally bizarre are the names of these ‘desirable residences.’ Of course there are ‘Belvedere’ and ‘Holly Bank,’ but there are names of greater cultural significance. ‘Chez-nous’ reveals a liking for French novels—‘Karachi,’ the past magnificence of Anglo-Indian officialdom ; and for one gaudy pile in yellow brick with castellated ramparts, including a pinnaced stable and garage, ‘Valhalla’ is not too ambitious a title.

Off the long road run parallel streets of humbler dwellings, a few shops, the Mission Chapel, the Nonconformist Meeting House. Intersecting lines of yet smaller ones cross these again, the cottages of the modern labourers. Everywhere there is space, an attempt at



trimness, at social aspiration. The contrast with Clayberswick is complete.

The dwellers in Summertown are rarely connected with the town by ties of work or interest. Their sojourn is generally a fleeting one. While the money is being made in the city, they endure the lean years as best they may. Here they find a decent obscurity for the inglorious period. Once the pile is made, they will retire to the glory of a more capacious residence—somewhere in its own private grounds. The outskirts of fashionable Newton, the renowned watering-place, is the dream of aspiring Summertown. To make money quickly, to rise one step higher in the social scale, and then to retire to the well-earned haven with its parlourmaid in a cap—this is the strongest link that binds these suburban circles together. The residents have little else in common. They share no civic ambitions, for they take no part in the civic life of the town. But socially they tread the same upward path.

Their children, of course, make certain common interests. Little private schools of varying degree of mediocrity have sprung up in Summertown. They supply the needs of the children before they are promoted to the Grammar School in Clayberswick—promoted indeed in their own eyes, not in those of their

parents. The Grammar School is a painful necessity. The tradesmen's sons attend it, and, low be it spoken, there are scholarships which admit the children of the Elementary Schools. The Secondary School at Newton is certainly preferable from the social point of view, but then there is the train journey, and the company of rude boys *en route*.

Of course, to some extent, politics provide a common interest for the men. But they are negative politics. They consist in general denunciation, in a general resistance to all the forward-moving currents. They do not nourish the springs of sympathy, of constructive activity. Politics of this cast unite indeed, but only in those sentiments which in the long run divide. United they are in smouldering resentment, in angry hostility to Government or Opposition, to whichever party it be which for the moment advocates what they dread, social reforms, increased taxation, higher rates. Since 1906 the wrath of villadom was concentrated on the Liberal Party. The Budget and the Parliament Act welded still closer together the forces of reaction, and under the banner of the Die-Hards villadom rallied as one. The Insurance Act, the Education Act, the Small Holdings Act, one by one they were met by a frenzy of opposition which drowned for the moment the

insistence of social and business ambitions, the little personal rubs and rivalries which, in less momentous times, provide the salt of life in Summertown.

Patriotism of a sort there is, but for want of wider scope it finds its chief vent in flags and bands, the catchwords of the Anti-German League, an indiscriminate hatred of the foreigner. For any sense of responsibility to the community, of serious citizenship, we look in vain.

Social life in a measure there is. Calls are paid, bridge is taken seriously, Sunday luncheons are given. But Newton supplies the excitements that Clayberswick lacks, and when they are to be had so easily, they are not worth the labour of organising at home. The theatre and music-hall, the concert-room and the restaurant, the large hotel with its lounge—these supply the colour and life so wanting in Summertown. One dinner at the 'Grand,' at whatever cost, will make up for many weeks of dull and ugly obscurity, for many days of eking out the Sunday beef to last the week.

Socially the class represented at Summertown is a stage above that which in the city has been stimulated by the Co-operative Movement, the Workers' Educational Association, the Adult Schools. It would regard itself

as superior to their appeal. It lacks the wider outlook of the class just above it, the class of the small professional man, who has graduated at a provincial University, and attends special Conferences in London. Of course, there are exceptions. Sympathy between individuals in this class and that of the manual workers, when it is real, is worth much more than sympathy between the country-house and the cottage on the green. For the latter is an English tradition, and it can hardly escape the taint of patronage. Personal friendship between the small villa and the back-yard of the country-town is quite spontaneous and can have no ulterior motive behind it; it supports no class ascendancy. But it is rare, for opportunities of social intercourse are few, and there is deep-rooted distrust of those for whose benefit the rates go up.

In the past there has been little to unite these classes. But to-day organised labour should include them both in its aims and enlist them in its service. For, economically, they are bound to draw nearer to each other, as the levelling hand of high and graduated taxation obliterates ever more effectively the dividing line between them. To some extent the War has begun the levelling process, for where wages have risen, stationary incomes have remained

where they were. Their interests lie in the same direction ultimately.

Summertown and Clayberswick are nearer together than they were before the War. They are nearer than Belgravia and Whitechapel will ever be.

THE COUNTRY-TOWN  
THOSE IN AUTHORITY





## CHAPTER VIII

### THOSE IN AUTHORITY

THIRTY and forty years ago Clayberswick was the site of a thriving wicker industry. Its baskets and chairs were famous in the markets of the South and East coasts, and its population was a steady one. Its nearness to the sea—dull bit of coast though it be—had suggested at one time a future of lodging-houses and bathing-machines. But the rising to fame of Newton—the now popular watering-place in the neighbourhood—had dispelled such dreams, and for want of a better transport system the basket industry has died the natural death of stagnation. Almost in a night, hotels, pump-rooms, concert-halls, theatres sprang up at Newton and the mineral springs attracted hosts of rheumatic invalids. The workers, unable to meet the rising rates, were pushed out of the town away over the two miles of heath and waste land to the muddy coast at Clayberswick, where tumble-down houses could be rented at 2s. 6d. and 3s. a week, and the general standard of

living made fewer demands on purse and appearance.

True, it is a six-mile walk to Leatherton gas-works and back, where, for many, the daily income is earned, farther still to some of the farms, but this is preferable to the extra expense of housing and living in Newton.

Clayberswick provides the Newton cab-drivers with a popular afternoon's excursion for the invalids. There are the ruins of a castle there, an ancient church, a faint smell of salt ; and the little town lies at the end of a wooded valley where the river emerges sluggishly and meanders off to the sea through the mud-flats, where sea-lavender and sea-pinks grow. About a mile away it flows out to the sea through the broken piers of the ancient harbour, all overgrown with seaweed and mussels. Down on the bridge which spans the river at the farther end of the town, the motors pause that the invalids may admire the view. It is easy to avoid a closer acquaintance with the town's squalid realities. The complete lack of enterprise which now pervades it, commercial enterprise, civic, social, proves but an added attraction to the afternoon drive from Newton, for stagnation and listlessness have a peculiar charm of their own. The solitary factory chimney down by

the river, the steam-laundry where the Newton hotels get their washing done cheap, the faint odour of fish in the air, these are the few remaining signs of a once thriving community. It is not surprising that there is so little independence about Clayberswick. In practice it has become merely the working-class suburb of Newton. The town is stricken with inertia. Tradesmen, builders, clergy, Local Authorities, all seem unconsciously affected. There are no decent houses for the people; but why should they be built? There is not work enough for those who already live there. So the vicious circle goes round. All the same a stream of cadgers and work-shys, incapables generally, haunt the little town. The charity of the place is traditional, and in spite of the Charity Commissioners, in spite of the much maligned C.O.S., its demoralising current continues to flow. And after all Clayberswick is a market-town, the centre of a flourishing agricultural district. It has some *raison d'être* still. It supports two parish churches, four chapels, four local doctors, two banks, a Town Hall. It has a public body of its own, an Urban District Council all to itself, responsible for its health, its education, its comfort. It has a Bench of Magistrates, a Board of Guardians. There is somebody then, some

proper authority, to deal with the owners of its dilapidated house-property—the houses which are condemned again and again and never closed—to expose the plague-spots of the town, so carefully hidden away in the dark back-yards where no casual visitor can find them out.

Yet the responsible authority does not do these things ; and the reasons for its impotence are manifold. Partly, no doubt, the class of local landlords is to blame. There is no one large landlord in Clayberswick or the district. There are many, and they are mostly poor people themselves, to be found in the meaner quarters of the large county towns, in the smaller farms of the district, in the side-streets of Clayberswick itself. They make a miserable and precarious living out of their rents, and they watch with complacency the decay of their property—it will last their time ; the Council can be trusted to keep quiet. Sanitary officers, medical officers of health, none of them have the heart to condemn the property of these poor people. No outlay is made for repairs, but the rents are low, and if the landlord must be excused much, the tenants on their side are under no obligation to refrain from damages.

But the landlords of Clayberswick are not

all poor men. The worst yard in the town is the property of an absentee landlord, a man of wealth and position on his distant estates. He seldom makes an appearance in Clayberswick where he is not popular, and the rents are paid to his agent, a small stationer in High Street. These houses, from which Mr. Vavasour draws no inconsiderable part of his income, have many of them but two rooms—some have only one—and a total lack of sanitation. But in this case complaints are effectually silenced by the threat of eviction, and after all it represents what England designates ‘freedom of contract,’ and believes it so vital to preserve.

No doubt too it suits the convenience of one class of tenants better than would the regulations of an active Housing Authority. Slackness on one hand encourages slackness on the other, and a mutual pact of slovenliness is the convenient result.

Rivalling Mr. Vavasour’s property in general dilapidation is that of Sir Hilary Barnes. Sir Hilary owns several villages, and is known as an indulgent landlord in the county. He is kind-hearted as far as a limited imagination allows, but he is profoundly ignorant of the domestic needs of the working-class urban population, and he takes no personal interest



in his tenants in the town. The state of his house-property disposes effectually of the argument that large landowners are the best. Here again it is the agent who is responsible, and no doubt he is loth to worry his master with repeated requests for repairs when his time is more than occupied with the duties of hunting in winter and social events in summer.

There is little to choose between the different house-owners of Clayberswick. For instance, there is Mr. Playfair, a prominent figure on the Council. He is an example to his fellow-townsmen in all the relationships of life. He has never missed his monthly communion, nor failed to pay his subscriptions to church expenses and clothing club; a model family man, and highly respected in the town. Mr. Playfair's house-property, nicely tucked away behind the parish church, is not often troubled by inspections. Government inspectors are politely shown another way round when they make their periodical visitations. A supply of would-be tenants is never lacking: for, presumably, there are some who prefer the rain on their pillows at night and windows that cannot be opened to no roof over their heads at all; and his rents are proverbially low.

Such conditions as these—accepted as they

are in Clayberswick with the halo of long custom about them—require an alert Housing Authority, however unpopular it would be in some quarters. But to be alert it must be independent of local influences, of that familiarity with decay which demoralises the most vigorous public bodies, of that web of vested interests which makes even an overloaded dust-bin or a leaky roof a gain for somebody or other. And in Clayberswick nearly all the Town Councillors have an interest in getting themselves elected. Most of the owners of house-property serve on the Council. So do a good proportion of builders, who keep a critical eye on the bye-laws, and exercise strong pressure on suspected housing reformers among the members. They pack the Housing Committee and see that no traitor to their interests sits upon it. Then there are the farmers. Though their natural preserve is the Rural District Council, they figure also in the town. They know how to keep inspectors out of their cowsheds and dairies. They are dexterous to nip in the bud the incipient local agitation for a Pure Milk Bill.

Of course the solicitors are on the Council ; they push their custom as well this way as another. There is generally a nonconformist minister ; and there is a clerical free-lance in



the shape of a retired parson from a villa in the outskirts. He is famous for his resistance to Infant-Life Protection Visitors, to Maternity Centres, to all new-fangled dodges, indeed, which relieve parents of their rightful responsibilities.

It is easy to sneer at the activities of the small Councils as 'parish-pump politics'; but after all to run the risk of defeat at the polls at the hands of the local butcher or builder is to ask a great deal of the civic patriotism of disinterested citizens. On the other hand there is no welcome for the labourer who ventures to aspire to a seat. It is 'taking him out of his place.' The small authorities, even the Education Committees, are vested with no real importance in the country-town, and they are accorded scant respect. Their reputation mattered little in times past, for their responsibilities included nothing more exalted than the lighting and scavenging of the streets; but now that duties of serious importance are deputed to them—local housing, public health, even education to some extent, the matter assumes a different complexion. The County Council exercises a hesitating control over their actions, a control keenly resented by the local bodies, and hence only rarely exerted.

The servants of the Local Authority in the small area are far from receiving the honour due to them. The Medical Officer of Health in Clayberswick is only a half-timer. In return for a miserable salary he is required to give a portion of his time and energies to the matter of the health of the town. His private practice is of course of paramount importance. When the claims of the public are represented by a maximum salary of £60 a year, it is small blame to the M.O.H. if his own interests stand first. Dr. Jones of Clayberswick is a case in point. The father of a large family of daughters, delicate, and all with social aspirations, he is dependent for their livelihood and education on a small country practice plus the pittance which represents his civic responsibilities. Is it for him to publish the defects of his private patients as landlords, as employers of labour, as owners of disease-ridden dairies and slaughter-houses? It is not worth his while. It would be a doubtful sort of altruism which would penalise his own family for the sake of the ultimate good of an ungrateful town. 'Charity begins at home'—so at least he has learnt from the cradle. And the Council is quite ready to relieve him of his office if he makes himself disagreeable.

Little improvement in the clearing of slums,

the provision of a pure milk supply, the reduction of the high rate of infant mortality, need be looked for while the M.O.H. is the inadequately paid, half-time servant of the Town Council. A complete independence of local influences, a larger area from which are drawn his employers, these are the indispensable conditions of a municipal medical service everywhere.

The labouring man of Clayberswick has not learned to look on the Medical Officer of the town as his friend. He has had scant reason to do so. He may think him a good doctor, slow to anger in the matter of unpaid bills, a convenient institution in the case of untimely confinements, of the removal of undesirable relations to the 'House'; but he has never had reason to regard him as his jealous advocate with obstinate landlords, as his children's protector against a contaminated milk supply or an ignorant Education Committee. He little realises the intimate connection of that £60 with his children's health and his daughters' morals.

Considering all the circumstances, it is remarkable that Dr. Jones has carried through some material improvements. In the face of much opposition, he has paved some cobbled yards, he has erected a number of

sanitary conveniences, he has prevailed on the Council to employ its own carts for the disposal of refuse, he has fenced in the town's rubbish heap with corrugated iron. But he is hampered at every turn by the recalcitrant Council whose humble servant he is, the Council which stands in practice for the protection of abuses it is appointed to remove. Dr. Jones's private practice lies in that class whose mental horizon is strictly limited by the incidence of the rates. It naturally keeps a jealous eye on his activities. He is liable to summary dismissal without reason given, and the personnel of the Council in Clayberswick does not exclude such a possibility. The country-town enjoys a scandal. It adds flavour to the local rag which beguiles the Sunday-morning pipe.

The members of the Sub-Education Committee are drawn from the Town Council. They are not appointed to this office by virtue of any interest in education, nor for any special understanding of the intellectual needs of the 'lower classes.' They are appointed for their leniency in granting exemption orders for the children. By this means they win popularity among the parents, and the approval of the ratepayers for so easing the burden of the rates. The Sub-Committee wages chronic warfare against its superior authorities.

It resents the imputation of slackness so often levelled against it through politely-worded memoranda from the Board of Education. It is always at loggerheads with the school-master, a devoted and capable man, whose appointment lies with the County Committee, and whose work is wholly unrecognised in the town in general. Here and there an educated man finds his way on to the Local Education Committee. A year or two of fruitless effort is generally enough to secure his resignation. One such in Clayberswick was the energetic Minister of the Wesleyan Church. For two years he waged war on behalf of the children's health: they must have a Health Visitor, a school clinic—he would impose a farthing rate to ensure them; the classrooms of the old church school are ill-ventilated—they must be demolished and rebuilt. He had ideas about education itself. He wanted a trained Kindergarten teacher for the infants, more space for freedom of movement in play, smaller classes. Life was soon made intolerable to him. His disappearance from the Education Committee was shortly followed by his resignation from the ministry of his church.

To keep down the rates is, in the view of the Clayberswick Urban District Council, the be-all and end-all of local government. The Councils



have not failed in their duty as long as, in their term of office, the rates have been stationary ; better still if they have been lowered. Such an ideal is not without its ostensible justification while the incidence of rating is unequal as it is. Until the unfair burdens are in some degree shifted and proportioned, 'loyalty' to a man's own class will continue to sum up for the majority the claims of both morality and religion.

Wealth and influence being what they are, social relationships so close, families so inter-related, it is hopeless to expect that the people in the small town should really express their opinions and wishes through the mouth of their representatives. Local celebrities become tin gods, and when this happens there is an end of independence in voting or in serving. This closely woven web of relationships never ceases to corrupt the activities of the local authority, to embitter and poison the sources of neighbourliness in the market-town.

In these days, when all far-seeing minds are turned to consider what new and more effective forms of government the future will bring forth, when it is realised that to one form of democracy or another the world is inevitably committed, it is well to consider the case of these smallest units of democratic government, and see that we learn the lessons

their failure provides. For here in pigmy form are presented all the problems of democratic government on the national scale. Here are to be seen the corrupting influences of wealth, of social prestige, of class-snobbery. Here the ruling spirits are too often the ambitious and the self-seeking, the men with an axe to grind in the town. Self-advertisement and wind-baggery are still the qualities that best make for success. Here are studied all the arts for the stifling of free opinion ; here reforming spirits are gagged, hush-money is paid in the form of cheap goods and low rents, *baksheesh* in the form of secret commissions. These are the obstacles which democracy has to overcome everywhere, no less in the country-town than in the nation. In greater or less degree the Council reflects the weak spots inherent in all its forms. The War has brought into relief its weakness in the national arena. The time may be coming faster than we imagine when we must consider other methods altogether of making effective the people's will.



THE COUNTRY-TOWN  
THE RECTORY



## CHAPTER IX

### THE RECTORY

THERE is bustle and stir in the Rectory of Clayberswick. It is the day of the annual sale—the happiest day of the year for the rector, that genial favourite of ‘the powers that be.’ Washington Irving would have hailed the rector at the squire’s Christmas dinner; he is the typical English country parson. Round, rosy, handsome, a famous raconteur, a good sportsman; there is nobody but wishes the old man well. One and all they like and respect him. To each he is ‘a fine chap’—to local magistrate, County Councillor, Master of the Hounds, Grand Dame of the Primrose League. And on his part, a glamour surrounds these titles; he reverences them. Long ago when he came as a young man, a strenuous young curate from one of the big industrial towns, he had other enthusiasms and ideals. Eager and optimistic, for a short-lived period he had wanted to change things, to reform the obvious abuses of the town, to make a stir. He had served in the city under a vicar who

belonged to the Christian Social Union ; he had sat at Canon Barnett's feet. So now he put up for the Urban District Council ; he had dreams of a housing-scheme. But the Council gave him no welcome : he never got appointed to the Housing Sub-Committee ; he was put on to finance and gas. He turned his attention to education instead. But the Sub-Education Committee of the small town exercises few powers, and its members are seldom seen inside the schools. His eager efforts to provide little desks in the infant school instead of the familiar benches with no backs were met with stubborn opposition, and the baffled curate, who above all things disliked to annoy, decided to dabble no longer in reforms : he would leave the town to take care of itself. Since nature intended him to be happy, it was the best course to take. Canon Stanley was henceforth happy ; he was popular and he was respected too. He gave up interfering with other people's affairs. He rendered unto Cæsar the things he concluded were Cæsar's, to God only the things which were God's. He had a decided gift for oratory. His sermons resounded with well-turned periods, his perorations sent a delicious thrill down the back. Sunday by Sunday the old fourteenth-century church attracted a large and fashionable congregation,

for it was drawn not only from the residential quarter of Clayberswick but from the smart neighbouring watering-place of Newton, which provided no such Sabbatical feasts for its visitors. In harmony with the eloquence were the performances of the young organist with his musical honours from Oxford, intent on starting a career in the provinces. The elaborate voluntaries and the ambitious anthems the choir tackled so bravely were part of the weekly programme. Organ recitals were given, and the Passion music in Lent. The church acquired quite a reputation for its elaborate music. It was really remarkable for a little country-town.

Mrs. Stanley, the rector's wife, is the moving power behind the pulpit. The perfect embodiment of the English lady, she lives up to the high demands of that institution in her immaculate person and appropriate activities. There is an innate and unmistakable refinement about Mrs. Stanley—voice, movements, manners, even her dress and her furniture, express it. In her dainty drawing-room with its spotless curtains, its little table of silver knickknacks, its ivory chessmen, we adopt, imperceptibly and perforce, quiet movements, gentle tones, the prevailing delicacy of speech. We pick our words, we choose our

topics, and we must beware how we open the door—a gust of wind from the hall may flutter the Japanese hand-screens off the mantelpiece, and the Christmas cards will follow them into the fire. The room is pervaded with the atmosphere so familiar to the English rectory, the atmosphere of detachment from the world and its coarse realities. Mrs. Stanley is not ‘genteel’—the commonness implied is wholly alien to her; she is just transparently ‘a lady.’

Manifold and varied are her works of charity. There is the Mothers’ Meeting, over which she has presided for twenty years; there is the Rescue work, the Bible Class for Young Women, the Missionary Union—they are one and all her special departments. But two causes are pre-eminently her own—rivals for first place in her affections. These are the London Society for the Conversion of the Jews, and the Primrose League. Both of them arouse a peculiar enthusiasm at the Rectory; there is the same sort of romance about them. Both appeal to those Old Testament ideals which dominate Church institutions in Clayberswick. The Rectory is fully aware of the subtle connection between Jerusalem and the British Empire.

For the first of these causes, the conversion of the Jews, a bazaar is held annually in the Town Hall. This is the great day in the parish

year. The Church workers rally round. Week by week, in the immaculate Rectory drawing-room, the ladies of Clayberswick have foregathered over the mysteries of antimacassars and tea-cosies, of pincushions and what-nots. From far and wide the denizens of the country-houses have been summoned by notices and covering letters. There are attractive headlines in the press, posters at every street corner. Mrs. Stanley is in all her glory. The Town Hall, adorned with Chinese lanterns, is hung from end to end with wreaths of paper flowers. Resplendent in her best black moiré, the jet at her throat shining with an extra polish, the rector's benign features in miniature at her bosom, she can afford to forget the distresses of the winter—the petty squabbles, the veiled insults that have too often marred the long preparations. In the soft pink light from the lanterns, and the rustle of fine dresses—for the country-houses are well represented if there is no near meet of the hounds—she greets the Conservative Member who has come to declare the sale open with her serenest smile, and conducts him to the platform as if to the manner born.

Mrs. Stanley's stall comes first below the platform, and her assistants are from villadom; the room is warm at this end, and the ground



not smeared with the preparations for tea which disorder the lower half of the hall. The arrangement of the stalls is an illuminating study in the social divisions of the town. Next to Mrs. Stanley's is the one presided over by the local doctors' wives. The daughters of a solicitor are their helpers, and the bank manager's wife wraps up parcels in the background. A stage lower down is the stall of the National Schools; the teachers are responsible for this, and the wives of some tradesmen lend a hand at the selling. Nearer the door is a 'fancy' stall—they are all 'fancy' in varying degrees—labelled 'Sunday School.' It is managed by overworked Sunday-school teachers; engrossed in other professions all the week, they have sat up late for many an evening to manufacture the knickknacks which, now displayed in their glory, maintain the reputation of their scholars for devotion to 'the Cause.' It is 'the dear children's work,' and patronised accordingly. Humblest and poorest of all is the Y.W.C.A. stall. In pre-war days, the Y.W.C.A. was considered an intruder in polite Church circles; it was dowdy. The day was still distant when it would charter a Park Lane mansion to house its workers. The lacey pincushions and paper cake-frills on the Y.W. stall are ruffled by the fierce draught

from the staircase, and visitors shake the wet and mud off their boots and coats in its vicinity.

The Jews no doubt hold first place in Mrs. Stanley's heart. But the cause of the Primrose League comes near it. 'We must be up to date,' she says when she invites us to the next tea-meeting in the Parish Hall. 'And the Primrose League is so democratic. It draws all classes together.' Mrs. Stanley warms to the task of propaganda—'It is so nice to see Lady Barnes pouring out tea for the poor women; it is so refining for them; and I expect it is a change for her too to see something of their lives.' Lady Cunliffe again is 'perfectly *sweet* with the babies; she held one mite on her knee all through the rector's speech.' Then Mrs. Stanley draws the moral. 'If only you could get the poor to realise what they owe to the leisured classes! No doubt they have their faults; some of them are *too* fond of pleasure. But even that is good for trade, and on the whole they are so generous to charities! There would be no clothing-club in Clayberswick and no annual treats either, without them. And they do set an example of patriotism! They understand the debt they owe their country, and they discharge it loyally on County Council and Magistrates' Bench.' Ah! That debt! Mrs.

Stanley becomes eloquent as she reflects upon it. 'An Established Church'; 'God first' in the affairs of the State—how different to poor France! (France was generally 'poor' before the War); the observance of Sunday; an open Bible; unparalleled wealth; an Empire on which the sun never sets. Yes, the Primrose League *reminds* the lower classes of all these privileges; enumerates unceasingly the benefits they possess as citizens of such an Empire. It reminds them too of their corresponding duties, of the respect they owe to property and place, of Imperial responsibilities.

It may seem a far cry from the slums of Clayberswick to these hallowed sanctities of Church and Empire. But we must not be parochial; that at all costs. Week by week in the Sunday sermon we hear of this priceless Imperial heritage of ours; it strikes the note of all the Rectory gatherings. Rudyard Kipling has not lived in vain, for Clayberswick Rectory at least has shouldered the 'white man's burden,' has thrilled with emotion to the Imperial appeal. The British Empire is sacrosanct; so are the State Church, the British Constitution, the voluntary system of charity, the Public Schools; so is private profit. These things mean religion, 'true religion and unde-filed.' The Church must stand or fall by them.

Mere occasions for flag-waving and clapping ! sneer the cynics, for Sunday-school treats and excursion trains, for buns, and banners, donkeys and swings ! Not at all. These things have real meaning for Clayberswick Rectory. Certain other things have the same : Sunday 'go-to-meeting' clothes, for instance, grace before meat, cold beef and cucumber for dinner on Sunday. They are indispensable to the Church. They are 'so English.' Home would not be home without them.



THE COUNTRY-TOWN  
THE COUNTY FAMILIES





## CHAPTER X

### THE COUNTY FAMILIES

WE do not see much of the county families in Clayberswick. It is something of an excitement when Lady Mount Morris' landau passes down High Street with its sleek horses and immaculate turn-out. Lord Cunliffe's motor dashing up to the Court House for the Bench is more familiar. Lady Mount Morris belongs to the old order of things. She ignores the fashionable innovations of the day as derogatory to her position and dignity. She has taken an oath that she will never own a motor. She does not recognise 'summer time,' and her guests, invited for 1.30 lunch, find themselves disconcerted, as they alight at the hall door, by the stable clock, which registers only 12.30.

It is these visions in the town that remind us agreeably that we are not without a link with the great world of society. Our county families have town-houses, and spend the season in London. They consort with the leaders of society; they are intimate with statesmen and diplomats. Sometimes our local meetings,

political or philanthropic, are graced by their presence. At the annual meeting of the Primrose League they turn up in goodly numbers on the platform, and at election time their motors jostle each other in High Street, and the ladies swarm in the back-yards of Clayberswick bedecked with the colours appropriate to the 'quality.'

When the Conservative Member holds his annual meeting in the Town Hall, they sit on the platform in serried ranks; and the squires from the villages round make nice, simple speeches to suit our intelligence. The subjects they favour lend themselves to invective: that is the style in which they excel. The Education Bill, the Insurance Act, the People's Budget gave ample scope. Until the War came, and with it the magic transformation of the most hated politicians into the Elysian fields of popularity, the Liberal Government, or the Liberal Opposition, whichever the case might be, was of course the *bête-noir*. The Labour Party was not yet worth the effort of abuse.

In the War, the tables were turned. Recruiting meetings with mud-throwing at 'pro-Germans' and 'pacifists' took the place of the familiar Primrose League gatherings. But the annual bazaar is still patronised by the county families; so is the occasional concert

in aid of some patriotic cause. On market day, in summer, they crowd round the fruit and flower stalls with baskets on their arms, for all the world like common people. The denizens of the country-houses are no idlers. Even before the War it was difficult enough to secure their attention for small local efforts. In winter the claims of hunting and the regular sporting fixtures of the county leave them little time to spare. Hunting is hard work—and a really serious sportsman ought not to undertake evening duties. The business and professional men to whom hunting is a recreation do not, of course, belong to that freemasonry of sport which includes the *élite*, but the hunting field lends social distinction; it hall-marks a man as a gentleman.

Of late years the county families have not been treated kindly. The trend of modern opinion—and legislation reflects it—is to oust them from their position as the recognised magnates. Their advice is not sought as it once was. They are no longer considered the sole experts on rural matters; they are no longer looked up to as the natural leaders of the people. Only—and that is in the village—they are still looked up to for charity. They are always receiving shocks. They discover one day that the Reading-room Committee, without

their sanction, is subscribing to a Radical newspaper; that the school has been let for a meeting about small-holdings or some other subversive cause. The result of the election proves that, in spite of all the tea-meetings and the motor drives to the poll, the labourers have not all voted blue. Agitators have been at work in the village; worst insult of all, an enquiry into housing conditions has taken place under the shadow of the Hall itself. A farm labourers' union has been started in the neighbourhood. The village tailor is actually running as a candidate for the District Council; it is rumoured he calls himself a socialist.

It is a real grief to the country-houses to note how easily the poor people fall a prey to these 'agitators,' these unscrupulous demagogues from the cities who interfere so disastrously in village affairs. Even coals and blankets at Christmas-time are not proof against these horrid influences. But what else can you expect, when those in the highest places in the land make use of their position and oratorical powers to set class against class, and 'peasant' against squire? Here, of course, Mr. Lloyd George came in for invective. He was the worst of the lot—up to 1914. His speeches against the dukes did irreparable damage to English country life. They undermined the old loyalties between

master and man, the old links which for generations had blended together the classes in one indissoluble whole. His 'bargee' language, his vulgarity, his lack of every gentlemanly instinct, how deplorable was their effect on the working-class ! The bitterness of the country-house against this popular idol reached its climax in 1909, when the People's Budget shook the British Constitution to its foundations, and the King was bidden by 'Diehards' of various complexions to break his coronation oath to the people. Mr. Lloyd George was responsible for that, and for every other distressing predicament. The demoralisation of the villages had spread all over the country. The people had lost the old sense of honour ; they actually drove to the poll in the squire's motor, and then voted yellow after all. Deep resentments which for generations had slumbered were stirred up afresh. The landlords had stolen the land from them under the Enclosure Acts ; that is one. Families of eight cannot maintain a proper physical efficiency on £1 a week ; that is another. They had been set against the old institutions which their fathers never dreamt of disputing : the tied-house system, part-payment in kind. Sunday labour. They had been told that working-men ought to govern the country ; that they ought to sit on the Magistrates'



Bench, on the Education Committee, on the District Councils. The whole country was seething with discontent. There were secret land-enquiries, revelations of things which need never have come to light at all if it had not been for the 'backstairs methods' of Mr. Lloyd George's investigators. As the county people drove to the meets in their motors, and gossiped in the county club, and met to play bridge on winter afternoons, they wrung their hands over the fate of the country; they mourned. The good old days had vanished. The country had gone to the dogs. Such was the despairing attitude of the county families before the War broke out.

Loudest of all in her lamentation was Lady Cunliffe of Broughton Castle. The root of the trouble to her is the lack of religion. There is no observance of Sunday. The people seem to think they can do exactly as 'we' do, and lead the same sort of lives. Of course *we* must have tennis and bridge on Sunday—that is perfectly different. Our officer-sons and the Eton boys expect it; besides we must make home attractive to them. But that is no reason why the poor should watch football matches and coursing competitions on Sunday afternoon. They are vulgar, low pastimes too. The nation that gives up its Sunday deteriorates

in all sorts of insidious ways. The cottages are dirtier than they used to be. Why, if Lady Cunliffe went into a cottage when she was young, the woman would curtsy and wipe the chair with her apron before she asked her to sit down ; now she does not ask her to sit down at all.

Of course some of our county families are more up to date than this. They move with the times. They spend part of the year in London, and bring back to the country a good *rechauffé* of all they have heard and seen there. They realise the narrowness of life in the village, and they try to widen our outlook. Morris-dancing and Girl Guides are in favour at Hayes Park. Of course Lady Cunliffe disapproves. She accosts Lady Hilary with questions which are really unanswerable. 'Do you really think it will make better housemaids of the girls?' she asks. 'Don't you think it takes them out of their proper place?' She makes us all feel uncomfortable. But after all, we plead, in hesitating self-defence, it is chiefly for the children's benefit that the dances are taught. It is rather a waste of time to dress up the big girls in sun-bonnets, and the lads in bells and top-hats. We really don't quite know why we do it. We are on safer ground when we discuss the village musical competitions. These things are clearly good for



the people ; nobody denies it ; they tend to ' draw classes together,' the supreme need of the hour. Only Lady Cunliffe will maintain that the G.F.S. was the safe and proper vehicle for doing it.

We still may find sometimes the landlord who takes his duties as seriously to heart as did the landlords of the benighted nineteenth century. He spends all his life on his estates. He hunts one day a week only ; he leads a strenuous life. He serves on all the public bodies, and presides over the County Chamber of Agriculture. Such is Colonel Johnson of Raynes Park. He is a widower, and his only daughter keeps house for him. Colonel Johnson's standards of housing and general conditions are distinctly in advance of those on the adjoining estates ; his farms bear marks of an unfamiliar efficiency. Of course, Colonel Johnson is not popular among his fellows. But he provides a standing example of the ideal landlord, and we are thankful that he is there to quote for the confusion of ' the agitators.' The shortcomings of others can be conveniently evaded behind the glamour of Colonel Johnson's virtues. He builds cottages at an annual loss ; he manages his estates himself without the assistance of an agent ; he executes repairs with astonishing promptitude. He disapproves of

the hunting-box element with its irresponsible hold on county life ; he has even been heard to suggest—in private, of course—that the country was made for men rather than for foxes. He would like to be a father to his people, and granted they will treat him as a father, no man on his estates will go unbefriended in old age or sickness. It is a matter of common knowledge that there is no intimidation at election times. No doubt Colonel Johnson suffers from being the model landlord of the countryside ; his responsibilities weigh heavily upon him. But he derives acute satisfaction from his good deeds.

The political influence of the county families had been on the wane for a long time before the War. The Parliament Act of 1909 had hit them hard, and Mr. Lloyd George's threatened land legislation had produced a sense of insecurity which deeply undermined the old position of the squires. But their social influence in the country was still paramount. The smaller squires, the doctors and solicitors from the country-town, the business men of the suburban villas, these are still to a great extent the social and intellectual satellites of the county families. They acquire notoriety by securing the patronage of the country-house.

The great event of the summer in the

country round Clayberswick, the great chance for aspiring careers, is Lady Cunliffe's garden party. Everybody of any sort of standing is invited to it, and no special glory attaches to the invitation ; but the occasion often leads to something more. Once there, Mrs. Holmes may be bidden to discuss the District Nursing Association with Lady Cunliffe on a subsequent occasion ; she may possibly be invited to lunch at the same time. That will be something to conjure with for many a long day. Mrs. Holmes may criticise, she may scoff at the airs Lady Cunliffe gives herself, but the invitation all the same is a distinct social asset. Any other engagement, however pressing, must be broken to comply with it, and in her heart of hearts, to be known as intimate with her Ladyship, to be singled out at the point-to-point or the hunt ball as a more than nodding acquaintance with Broughton Castle, is her most coveted ambition. The same is true of Mr. Standing the dentist. If he can relate while he gags his victims in the chair how he caught this troublesome cold while out shooting last week with Lord Cunliffe, it is a distinct commercial asset, an undoubted social advantage to himself.

Education, quick transit, the gradual elimination of class distinctions through the equalising tendency of increased taxation, these are

bound in time to diminish the social prestige of the country-house. But it will die hard. Life in a small town is too limited in horizon, too dependent for romance on its occasional contact with the social world above it, to afford to dispense with this outlet to its aspirations.

The traditional alliance of the National Church with the landed gentry is still a factor to be reckoned with in country life. Parson and squire with the help of the farmers compose a solid alliance of vested interests, and present a dull if sometimes half-conscious resistance to the social and economic emancipation of the labourer. They exercise a subtle pressure in many directions. A newly arrived carpenter in a village of my acquaintance received an order from the Hall for new wooden desks for the Sunday School. The matter had been amicably discussed before Lady Bountiful took the chance of hinting at a more regular attendance at Church. The carpenter disclaimed membership of the Anglican Church with all courtesy ; he frequented 'Chapel.' Next day a curt letter withdrew the order, with the excuse that the making of the desks would be postponed. It was postponed, but only until her Ladyship's next visit to the country-town. Then a pronounced churchman in the trade was requested to carry out the order.

Almost any heretical principles are tolerated by the Hall more readily than Dissent. The dissenting ministers are not often resident in the villages; they minister by turn in the chapels, and are unknown quantities at the Hall. Personally unacquainted with each other, they are of course suspected of every evil propensity, Radicalism, Socialism, godlessness generally. They alienate the sympathies of the people from their traditional leaders. Their influence is destructive of the last relics of the time-honoured feudal conditions which still exist in the village, though with waning power. At election times they vote yellow, and lead astray the members of their flocks. In religion they are canting hypocrites; the dignity of the Anglican Church revolts at their slimy sanctimoniousness. It is a curious fact that, though in the country-town Dissent is more secure than in the village, it will be the last stronghold of 'country-house' influence. That influence will die out in the village before it relaxes its hold on the town. For in the village legislation will be directed against it. The growing influence of the small-holder, the greater independence which a minimum wage and the break-up of the large estates will secure, will all contribute. Extended Old Age Pensions, an effective system of insurance, better houses, better rural edu-



cation will weaken the dependence of the villages on the Hall; and these things are already practical politics. They are within reach of actual attainment. But in the town the strongest influences are social, and the soil in which they flourish best is that of the lower middle-class, the class of the small tradesmen, clerks, insurance agents, publicans, managers of local works. Hitherto the interests of these classes have coincided with those of the country-house. They have been united in a common resistance to legislation which caters first for the manual workers, and by badly graduated taxation leaves the lower middle-classes often in a more precarious position financially than the labourers themselves. The middle-classes are beginning to realise at last that their best interests lie in throwing in their lot with the manual workers. This will fundamentally alter the familiar configuration of society in the small towns. But it will be a long time yet before the main interest of High Street ceases to centre in the personal doings—preferably in the personal misdemeanours—of Castle and Hall.





THE COUNTRY-TOWN  
MARKET DAY



## CHAPTER XI

### MARKET DAY

**I**T is Wednesday morning in a warm July. Wednesday is Clayberswick's gala day. There is life and movement everywhere, bustle and chattering in the streets, business in the shops, carts laden with hens, eggs, butter and vegetables, coming in from the country ; strange, foreign-looking salesmen hoarsely gesticulating their wares. It is market day, and Clayberswick has woken from its week-long slumber ; for Clayberswick, reversing the practice of Christendom, works one day in the week and rests six. But on this working day it is wide awake, and enjoys itself vastly. The quaint old market-place is thronged with buyers, and gay with the long lines of well-stocked stalls. There is an imposing row of farmers' wives, neat and portly, each erect behind her basket of eggs and shining pile of butter. The stalls of flowers are bright as those of an Italian market ; there are heaps of yellow marigolds, white pinks, carnations and roses, pots of blossoming cherry-pie ; there

is a fine display of fresh vegetables, great piles of strawberries and magnificent bunches of grapes from the country-houses in the neighbourhood, the gardens of which are often a source of profit now-a-days. Behind the line of flowers and fruit is the drapery, the cheap Bradford woollens, the embroidered calicoes and muslins, the bright ribbons and silk remnants; and then there are all the ready-made things—caps and belts, children's coats and breeches, slippers and stockings. Gaudy and garish is the Oriental stall, a heavy, hook-nosed Armenian in charge, who really talks broken English, and delights the country-house visitors with his quaint attempts at French. It doesn't matter a bit if the Armenian embroidery is really Armenian; if the green Egyptian scarabs and the bright-coloured beads are made in Alexandria or in Birmingham; they are just as attractive wherever they come from, and the salesman at least is a foreigner of some sort. We get our romance just the same. Most seductive of all is the great wooden crate full of pewter mugs new and old, of brass and copper bowls and rusty candlesticks; and tempting too the old china stall with red and white cows, and spotty dogs, all warranted 'genuine,' and all inviting a bargain. There is crockery of every sort—delightful

gaudy bowls for a few pence, and behind them the 'patent medicines,' all done up in paper packets, fabulously cheap, and warranted to cure all diseases known to man, from cancer to coughing. Many a mother stands agog to hear the salesman pour forth his lies and gull the unwary into a pennyworth of his poison. 'It will keep the baby quiet' or 'cure consumption'; it is all gospel truth. But this is in the background of the market, and patent medicines are not 'cried' till the afternoon, for the fine ladies would mock if they heard when they step out from the motors and dog-carts with their baskets to buy.

Clayberswick market provides a welcome distraction for country-house visitors in summer-time; for summer is apt to be long and tedious in a hunting county, and it is 'something quaint' to take one's friends to see.

In the High Street there is periodically a horse-market as well, and besides the line of farm-horses which flank the street, ponies and cobs are driven up and down for inspection. The country-house rejoices, and discusses their points with astonishing knowledge. We listen and enjoy that sense of unity with the classes above us that the cult of horses provides.

In winter, social events are rare and less

entertaining. If ever Clayberswick encouraged local talent, it has long ceased to do so. High Street and Summertown depend on Newton for their society, their intellectual and artistic distractions. The larger villas on the outskirts of the town of course aim higher. County society is their goal, and like their social 'betters' they hunt, they attend county balls, they watch the 'point-to-point' from the grand-stand.

But for the class of tradesmen and farmers of the district, the upper servants of the country-houses round, the smaller employers of labour, some social outlet must be found in the endless winter months. And so they have started 'whist-drives.' The whist-drives are organised by one or the other of the two political clubs. The Conservative and the Liberal Clubs do not in Clayberswick exist to propagate particular political principles. Nothing of the sort. They exist for social purposes. A reading-room is available for those who aspire intellectually to the *Daily News* or the *Daily Mail*, but beyond that they have nothing to do with politics. To pay expenses their Committees organise whist-drives and dances, and surely nowhere are they conducted with more portentous decorum than at Clayberswick. From eight p.m

to twelve o'clock, a hundred people sit at the card-tables, engrossed in the game, without the excitement of any gamble, with only the variety of lemonade and cakes at regular intervals, and the uncertain chance of a 7s. 6d. prize at the end. This prize represents the link with party-principles—for it is generally presented by the Tory Member or the Liberal Candidate as the case may be. In the recipient's breast, at least, it may serve to revive a dormant loyalty to the cause he represents.

Even lemonade and buns do not disturb the decorum which envelops the card-tables; but at half-past twelve they are cleared, and dancing begins. The dancing is equally dignified. Fox-trots have begun to succeed the quadrilles, but even they are conducted with pompous solemnity. By three o'clock all is over: the revellers wade home through the slush, well satisfied with their entertainment, well furnished with topics of conversation for future social occasions. The clothes of their fellow-players or the reduced standard of the prizes will occupy the mental horizon for many weeks to come.

Whist-drives and dances of this sort afford the one opportunity of social recreation in Clayberswick. If their purpose is to cultivate a spirit of fellowship, they must be said to



fail, but they provide a respectable matrimonial agency for the district, and they pay the expenses of the only form of social club the town can boast.

Other attempts to 'make' society have failed. In a somewhat higher stratum than that which frequents the whist-drives, monthly subscription dances were started one winter. For a time the daughters of High Street and Summertown rallied gladly. But one catastrophe after another doomed them to failure, and the enterprise was finally wrecked when a retired tradesman got hold of a ticket and sent his wife and daughter. This was too much for the *amour propre* of the *élite*. Never again should the doctor's daughters, much less the vicar's, grace the assembly. The 'ladies' of High Street were shocked beyond measure; and the monthly dances died a natural death.

Other enterprises have survived scarcely longer. Literary societies have been launched, choral societies, Shakespeare readings; but none of them lived as long as a year.

Two forces could produce the unity and concord which Clayberswick needs; religious enthusiasm, and the motive of intelligent citizenship. But neither of them are vital forces in the country-town. The clergy are regarded as the pillars of society, not as its

reformers or prophets. And they stay so long in Clayberswick, it is so remote from the purview of troublesome Bishops and interfering Missioners, the Rectory lends itself so admirably to the upbringing of a large family—that the clergy themselves succumb to the spirit of ease and acquiescence in things as they are, which distinguishes the general character of the town. Nor is there any reason to cultivate the civic sense as long as we live on Newton and its reputation. Newton provides us with the enterprise and entertainment we ought to provide for ourselves. We live on the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table; and as long as we do this, we are doing nothing to arrest the slow but sure decline of Clayberswick to obscurity.



THE PASSING OF THE OLD  
ORDER



## CHAPTER XII

### THE PASSING OF THE OLD ORDER

IT is very still in the hall to-night. There is no sound but the raindrops dripping on the gravel outside; there is no wind. The red glow of the fire flickers steadily on the white and black of the marble floor. It warms the pink coats of the old squires in their heavy frames on the walls, and adds dignity to their homely features. It reddens the pipes of the little old organ in its demure mahogany case. It lights up the gilt on the gallery railings up above.

We used to run round that gallery in our white frocks every evening on our way to the drawing-room after tea. Secure in our own strongholds, we peered through those railings at the 'company' down in the hall. We listened to family prayers up there, wriggling restive on our nurses' knees, not yet to be trusted downstairs.

On that marble floor in the hall we used to lie flat on our backs to cool ourselves, in hot, far-off days. We ran across it breathless, full of vague terrors, on our way to bed. On

winter nights it was clammy and cold, dark with eerie shadows. It was our great, strange world—the hall, fraught with all sorts of possibilities, of adventures and risks. There we collected on all important occasions, to greet the returning traveller, the little uncouth schoolboy. There we met to say goodbye. It was there we first played a part in life, manfully, or weakly, as the case might be: pretending we did not mind a farewell, putting on grown-up airs.

It was there, in later years, that all our best life was lived. There we exchanged ideas; there music and poetry drew back the veil that hides real things from our eyes. Young men saw visions there, the older found repose. And there was always the children's corner with the rocking-boat—the hall left nobody out.

It was here we used to imagine the end of it all—how one day we must leave it and say goodbye. With the dramatic instinct of youth we conjured up the scene, the tragic poignancy of farewell.

But now it has come, and it is strange that we feel so little. There is only a sense of numbness, there is nothing acute in our sensations. Is it the dulness of the passing years, the blurring of perception? Is it



that feeling always loses in intensity as time goes on, that we can never again feel as vividly as once we did? Are they gone altogether, and for ever, those passionate loves of youth? We loved our home with very gallant hearts, we children, lavishing our devotion on the place, wooing her as a mistress, winning her secrets by loving her.

Life at Warren Leaves was full of romance in the old days. It was fraught, even in later years, with infinite possibilities. It was not restful; it was too stimulating for that. But the background was always restful. In winter the great groups of elm-trees in the park stood sheltering around us, their mighty heads serenely aloft, no windswept lurch about them. They broke the force of any storm, and kept their forms intact.

And among the lilac-bushes, in the long grass where the early crocus grows, no sound is heard in winter but the drip of the damp into the oozing clay beneath. The thrush sings early there; often before January is out you may hear his 'island voice,' and then the deathly peace of winter holds the promise of all the pageantry to come. February, and even boisterous March, can wear a tender grace down there in the valley; and when April comes there are the daffodils.

But June is the best of all, for then beauty runs riot among the sorrel and the buttercups, the tall cow-parsley and the pink wild-rose. It is always afternoon there, in June, with the light, the radiance, the glitter of a myriad insect-wings, as the sun travels majestically lower, and the pond is alive with birds.

‘ And sometimes through the long, still day  
The breeding herons slowly rise,  
Lifting grey tranquil wings away  
To tranquil skies.’

Summer is summer everywhere, but here it catches at one's heart. No country ever yielded itself to summer's robing more luringly than this. No folding hills, no grass-clad slopes, no hedgerows all alive, ever heralded her coming with gladder welcome. And when evening comes, the water in the hollow lies placid like a pearl in the twilight, down there beyond the copse; and the stillness—the familiar stillness of the valley—broods over the land.

But the time has come to say farewell to it all, and memories clamour insistently to-night, irresistible, compelling memories. Some are happy, some are sad: all of them are very real. But why do we shrink from them so? Why are we afraid of the touch of the dear dead hands?

Surely it is not that life has disillusioned us, that we are disappointed with the hopes and expectations the place inspired, that we feel it promised us what life could never give. No, we have not been betrayed, we are sure of that. Are we disappointed then with our own share in it, with our pitiful failure to live up to the aspirations? Or is it just that we have grown old, that things of material import have less and less the power to disturb our happiness, or to augment it? Can it be that the place has told us all her secrets, that we are tired of the oft-told tale? No, she lures us still with her loveliness, perplexes, tantalises us still.

This, I believe, is the secret of this reluctance to face the past, this half-indifference to the ending of so lovable a thing. It is that in our heart of hearts we know that its meaning is lost; what it stood for is dead. The order to which the place belonged, the conditions which lent it significance, value, these are passing away. Very quickly they are passing too. For many a year the old order was unsteady on its foundations, the ground was not very sure under our feet. There was something incongruous about it all, its ordered ways, its palpable limitations. For many years it had not been as it was in the great days of

old. We were conscious of it ourselves, only we could not face it, open-eyed.

The old order was passing even then, but there at Warren Leaves it seemed more secure, more possible than elsewhere. Its setting was harmonious. It held so much that had lasting value, things we felt we must pass on to our children even at the risk of a little sacrifice, a little unfaithfulness perhaps to the light within. It was easy there, if nowhere else, to fill the old bottles with the new wine, to keep the old forms, and yet to fill them with new life. Was this not just *the one* place, the one chance of making the best of both worlds, the passing world of tradition, of authority, of established things; the coming world of surging, restless, violent reactions? All civilisation was in flux, all pregnant ideas were crude: they were fateful, charged with vital import. Could we not welcome them here, soften and dignify them with the hallowed restraint of this one dear place?

It would not be possible elsewhere, this we were sure of. But here all that was best of the old wore so gracious an aspect; such courtly welcome was given to all that was best in the new. There was respect for the individual, deference to real worth, such indifference to the mere trappings of the *ancien*

*régime*. Would it not be allowable here—just here—to keep this priceless thing and pass it on to another generation? What if the meaning and the value had died out of old institutions everywhere else? They still were living here, they still expressed reality; they could blend with the unfamiliar forms of the younger world, something compact of both old and new.

The great world-wide catastrophe of 1914 was to show us how mistaken we were. No institution of the old world could survive intact that fell destructive storm, however deeply rooted.

The War has brought everything to an end as we have known it. When the very foundations of European civilisation are rocking, can we hope to retain in its familiar guise any one of the old forms? Surely the very face of the countryside will wear a different aspect in the time to come, almost like that neighbouring stricken land where hills have disappeared and valleys have been exalted in a night, under the engines of man's rage for destruction. There must be vast changes in the mere aspect of the country when the old machinery of rural life is disintegrated as it must be, and intensive culture against the next war has transformed the leisurely grace of the



fields and woodlands into a chessboard of hedged-in squares.

Surely 'West Hill' itself, with its poplar sentinel, can never look the same for long in a world where all still things are overwhelmed in the rush and struggle for existence, material and moral, in the resistless impact of man, blind and led no longer, awake and determined, out to grasp and keep, this time, the things so long denied him. He too, the disinherited, will claim the beauty and the dignity, the leisure and the spaciousness of the life we favoured ones have grown in. He too, disabused of our charity, of our condescension, disillusioned of a world that always promised and never gave, will demand his share.

And knowing his need, his growing ripeness for what we, all unmeriting, have taken as our right, we cannot refuse him. That we never learnt at Warren Leaves. But his claim is not to be reconciled with the claims of the old world. The vested rights of the few, the dependence of the mass—the leisure and the spaciousness of homes like ours, these things are not compatible with his demands. We asked too much for ourselves, too much of beauty and graciousness, too warm a forcing-house for our lives, too sheltered an atmosphere; and to prolong it now, this relic of old-world stable things, to

project it into a world of uncertainties, of unstable foundations, it would be a cruel, senseless thing. Unloving eyes would mock, ungentle hands would touch it. Better it should die.

And the place could never be loved again as we loved it ; never, because there are so many loves to-day, so many claims. To us there was but one love in the old days—our home. Never by those whose youth has been passed in the transition days of the last twenty-five years. To them the country stands for pleasure, for sport, for relaxation. They have week-ended there, they have taken their summer holidays in its famous beauty spots. But it is not the pivot of their lives, the centre of their affections. They know earth's celebrated haunts ; but they have not watched breathless for the hatching of the coots' eggs on the pond ; they cannot tell you which trees the starlings will roost in to-night ; they do not know the place by the brook where first the white violet blooms in March.

The War, with its chaos and its ruin, has made us quite sure that life for each of us personally will never be the same again. But for the country too, all the old things are passing quick. Better hasten their passing, better hold nothing back. We may find ourselves



overtaken by the tide, too heavily weighted to adjust our stumbling feet.

And yet, as we pass along, not memory alone will bid us pause betime in our hurrying flight—pause, and shake the dust from our swift-moving feet. Part of our deepest selves will summon us, summon us back to the quiet paths among the elm-trees, to the garden of peace in its red old walls, to the water in the hollow, with the starlings aflight across the sunset red.







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